GREAT SCIENCE FICTION

No. 4 50¢

FROM FANTASTIC

BRYCE WALTON

FRITZ LEIBER

ROBERT BLOCH

ROG PHILLIPS

LLOYD BIGGLE JR.

JACK SHARKEY

MACK REYNOLDS · ROBERT F. YOUNG

RANDALL GARRETT

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FANTASTIC IS NOW LARGER THAN EVER WITH AN ADDITIONAL 32 PAGES PER ISSUE! MORE PAGES—MORE STORIES

Subscribe now and read top science-fiction and fantasy stories by such great names as ISAAC ASIMOV, RAY BRADBURY, FRITZ LEIBER, THEODORE STURGEON, CLIFFORD D. SIMAK, KEITH LAUMER, L. SPRAGUE deCAMP, ROBERT BLOCH, ROBERT SHECKLEY, etc.

SCIENCE FICTION•FANTASY

FANTASTIC

Only $2.50 for one year (6 issues)
EXTRA BONUS! Did you miss any of these great stories.
FREE if you subscribe now. (One for every 1 year sub.)

763 He That Hath Wings
by Edmond Hamilton

564 Adept's Gambit
by Fritz Leiber

764 The Kragen
by Jack Vance

863 Bazaar of the Bizarre
by Fritz Leiber

964 Planet of Change
by J. T. McIntosh

963 The House That Time Forgot
by Robert F. Young

1164 The Knocking in the Castle
by Henry Slesar

1264 The Unteleported Man
by Philip K. Dick

165 Repairmen of Cyclops
by John Brunner

3/65 The Pillars of Chambaler
by John Jakes

264 Novelty Act
by Philip K. Dick

464 Centipedes of Space
by Daniel F. Galouye

463 Some Fabulous Yonder
by Philip Jose Farmer

963 The Demon of the North
by C. C. MacApp

364 The Graveyard Heart
by Roger Zelazny

CLIP AND MAIL THIS MONEY-SAVING COUPON TODAY.

Enter my subscription for the **New Giant** 162 page FANTASTIC STORIES (Extra 32 pages)
6 Issues only $2.50 ..... 12 Issues only $4.50 .....

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ **State** _____ **Zip Code** _____

Send the following free issues ..... [List by number]
(Add 50¢ per year additional postage for Canada and Pan American countries; and $1 per year extra for all other foreign orders.)

Mail to: Fantastic / Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GREAT SCIENCE FICTION FROM FANTASTIC

LLOYD BIGGLE, JR.	4	THE MADDER THEY COME
BRYCE WALTON	16	THE MAN ON THE ISLAND
ROG PHILIPS	26	WORLD OF TRAITORS
FRITZ LEIBER	43	DAMNATION MORNING
JACK SHARKEY	57	THE KINK-REMOVER
MACK REYNOLDS	64	TORO!
ROBERT F. YOUNG	75	MR. AND MRS. SATURDAY NIGHT
ROBERT BLOCH	83	THE FUNNEL OF GOD
RANDALL GARRETT	108	THE PRICE OF EGGS

GREAT SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, is published quarterly by Ultimate Publishing Co., Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364 at 50¢ a copy. Subscription rates: One year (4 issues) U.S. and possessions: $1.65; Canada and Pan American Union Countries: $2.00; all other countries: $2.50. Copyright 1966 by Ultimate Publishing Co., Copyrighted 1957, 1958, 1959 1960 by Ziff-Davis Publishing Co. All rights reserved.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Madder They Come

Come visit a madhouse. Meet some of the guests. You may come out wondering who's mad and who's sane. In fact, you may come out worrying about yourself.

By LLOYD BIGGLE, Jr.

ILLUSTRATOR MARTINEZ

DOCTOR Stanley Hollinger was in a mild hurry, that Monday afternoon. It was a fine September day, and there was a new nurse over in the Out-Patient Division. He had not met her, but he'd glimpsed her that morning, from a distance. She was shapely, she had flaming red hair, and she flashed the kind of mocking little smile that affects men in odd ways. It affected Stanley Hollinger in just the right way, and he had no intention of letting the sun go down without getting to know her better.

He went down the hallway at a brisk trot, unlocked a door, and stepped through. A heinous bedlam smote him in the face, and he carefully closed the door behind him, and locked it.

"Three wards to go," he told himself. And then the redhead. He wondered what time she got off duty. He wondered if she would be busy that night. He restrained his urge to turn and walk out, and tried to concentrate on the patients. It took some effort.

Most of the staff doctors rarely bothered with ward visits, but Hollinger felt differently about it. A patient's behavior out in a ward often gave him some insight he never could have gleaned in his office. He brushed aside the memory of the redhead's smile, and stood looking about him with detached professional interest.

His first impression was that Ward Fifteen was quieter than usual, and that vaguely disturbed him. Not that there

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was any lack of noise about him. Screams, shouts and verbal explosions cut the air above the general hubbub. In the far corner, a swarthy little fellow had bribed or coerced three fellow patients into forming an audience, and they squatted on the floor in front of him while he howled at them hysterically. There was a singer in the center of the room who stopped every few notes and bowed almost correctly. A frail, middle-aged man was straining heroically to get a polisher started. He perspired, he moaned and grunted, and his face had a feverish flush. In front of him, a giant of a man was helping him out by bellowing encouragement while he hauled laboriously on an invisible rope. The polisher remained motionless.

Charlie Andrews, the robust, good-natured attendant, walked over to Hollinger and nodded politely. "Afternoon, Doctor Hollinger."

"Good afternoon, Charlie," Hollinger said.

He glanced about the room again—at the card game, where one player had most of the deck fanned out in his hand and two players concentrated intently upon no cards at all, at the sleeping forms scattered about haphazardly on the floor, at the morose patients who huddled on the wooden benches and stared vacantly into some remote dimension. One patient had managed to stretch out on a bench, and two patients were sitting on top of him, and none of the three seemed to mind.

Suddenly Hollinger understood the apparent quietness. The piano was silent.

"Where's the musician?" he said.

"He can't play today. He has a broken finger—he says."

Hollinger nodded, and picked out the musician—ex-musician—among the bench-sitters. He was a young man who had been a promising pianist, and he'd worked out a brilliant harmonization of *America* which seemed to be mainly atonal. At least, it sounded atonal after an hour or two of uninterrupted repetitions.

"Same old thing, eh, Charlie?" Hollinger said.

"It sure is," Charlie said.

Hollinger shrugged. He'd only been at the Cardale State Hospital for six months, but a staff member became quickly inured to the extraordinary. If he did not, the chances were excellent that he would stop being a staff member, and better than average that he would

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

find himself well on the way to meeting the rather stiff entrance qualifications imposed upon the patients.

"Well . . ." Hollinger said, turning to leave. He stopped. "Where'd they get the broom?"

Charlie whirled, and swore savagely. "Now who smuggled that in here?"

He bounded forward, and Hollinger called sharply to him. "Wait!"

A chubby, white-haired man had the broom up in the air, trying to balance it on his nose. He steadied it, took away his hands, and ducked awkwardly as it crashed to the floor. Undaunted, he raised it again. The other patients ignored him.

"Sidney Carter, isn't it?" Hollinger said.

"Yeah," Charlie said. "That is Sid, all right."

The broom crashed down a second time, and a third. Hollinger kept count, his clinical curiosity aroused. How many failures would Sidney Carter tolerate before he lost interest?

The broom came down a fourth time, and whacked Carter soundly on the head as it fell. He picked it up, and studied it with an air of mystification.

"Shall I take it away from him?" Charlie asked.

"Wait," Hollinger said.

The broom went up again, was steadied, released, and—stayed. Carter staggered about wildly, body arched back, nose erect, and somehow kept the broom in the air. He regained his equilibrium, and boldly started a triumphant circuit of the room. Another patient followed along behind, mimicking his contorted posture and jerky movements.

The procession had gone twenty feet, and was picking up speed, when Carter walked out from under the broom. He did not immediately notice this oversight. He kept moving forward, back arched, nose erect. Hollinger forgot Carter and concentrated on the broom—because the broom did not seem to notice the oversight, either. It hung in mid-air, motionlessly perpendicular, and Carter's mimic strutted under it, grinned at the sight of it hovering over him, and moved on.

Ten feet away, Carter suddenly missed the broom. He straightened up with a look of profound surprise on his round face, and turned just in time to see the broom plummet downwards.

"Did you see that?" Hollinger muttered.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No," Charlie said. "No—I don't think I did."

On his way back to his office, Hollinger encountered the red-headed nurse in the hallway. He passed her by without so much as a nod.

That evening Hollinger and Charlie Andrews sat in the comfortable quarters of Doctor Willard Manley, the hospital's Associate Director. Hollinger told their story, and Doctor Manley listened, and gazed peacefully at the fire that crackled in the fireplace, and stirred himself only to refill their glasses. His twitching eyebrows registered just the proper amount of incredulity, and he said nothing.

"You act," Hollinger said, "as if you don't believe us."

"I don't."

"Why not? We were both there. We both saw it."

"I'm glad the Doc was there," Charlie broke in. "If it was just me that saw it, I'd of never mentioned it."

"Exactly," Doctor Manley said. "One hears about so many queer things around a place like this."

Hollinger exploded. "We're not patients, damn it!"

"No!" Manley admitted, cocking his bald head as if he thought that condition could be corrected easily enough. "You say you saw it. Now what do you want to do about it?"

"I was going to suggest that we give Carter a broom tomorrow, and you watch yourself and see what happens."

"All right," Doctor Manley said. "I will. Ordinarily I refuse to dignify an irrational experiment by my presence, but it's obvious that I'll have to get to the bottom of this thing, Hollinger, if there's going to be any work done in your section this week."

Hollinger winced, and afterwards he was rather glad that his response had been inaudible.

The following morning Doctors Manley and Hollinger waited unobtrusively in one corner of the room, while Charlie Andrews handed a broom to Sidney Carter. They watched as Carter solemnly swept his way around the room twice, energetically sending up clouds of imaginary dust. Eventually Carter dropped the broom and wandered away. Another patient picked it up, straddled it, and galloped about uttering piercing whoops. When he discarded it and slumped panting to the floor, a third patient seized it, raised it to his shoulder, and carefully shot the musician,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

who was beginning his hundred and tenth rendition of *America*. The musician whirled when his fellow patient shouted, "Bang!" He walked over and jerked the broom out of his hands, laid it down on the floor, and returned to the piano.

"At least the fellow still has some critical faculty," Doctor Manley murmured.

A patient left the card table, grabbed the broom, and made like a baton twirler. The broom handle struck the floor its first time around, and the broom fluttered away. Sidney Carter picked it up, and resumed his sweeping.

Doctor Manley grunted disgustedly. "This is where I came in."

"Give him a chance," Hollinger said.

Carter slid the broom across the floor, and joined the kibitzers around the card game. He leaned over and coyly studied the hand of a player who held no cards.

"Let me try something," Charlie said. He picked up the broom and held it in the air, over his head. Carter saw him and hurried back, babbling excitedly. Charlie handed him the broom, and slowly edged away from him. Hollinger took out a stop watch, and waited.

On Carter's third try the broom stayed up. He gave a nasal shout of triumph, and staggered away. He negotiated half-a-dozen steps safely, stumbled over a sleeping patient, and lost his balance. Hollinger clicked his stop watch, and waited breathlessly. The broom remained in the air, swinging slowly, like a pendulum.

Carter landed heavily on his rear. For a few seconds he sat looking about foolishly. Then he remembered his broom. He finally located it, and scrambled to his feet just as it slid slowly floorward.

Hollinger clicked his stop watch again.

"How long?" Doctor Manley asked.

"Eighteen seconds."

"It seemed like a week. Let's get out of here."

Charlie let them out, and locked the door after them. They strolled down the dingy hallway, unlocked another door, and stepped out into the bright fall sunshine. Doctor Manley led the way across the hospital grounds to a bench. They sat down, lit cigarettes, and looked out on a quiet residential street.

"Telekinesis," Doctor Manley said.

"It has to be," Hollinger admitted.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"So much has been written about the so-called *psi* powers, both fact and fiction. Especially fiction. At one time in the past the subject—ah—interested me. I remember tales of good people using *psi* powers benevolently, and bad people using *psi* powers fiendishly. But I don't recall anything about an insane person having them. What does he use them for? What possible benefit could such powers be to him, or to anyone else? Good and bad are only relative terms, you know, but this person could be dangerous. So what do we do about it? Nail everything down, and forget it?"

"I honestly don't know," Hollinger said.

"I think we have an obligation," Manley said thoughtfully. "An obligation to study and experiment. If we can find out who it is, of course."

Hollinger turned quickly. "Who it is? But Carter . . ."

"Not Carter. Think back on the way he reacted. Someone helped him balance the broom, and held it up when he fell. How many men do you have in that ward?"

"Thirty-four."

"Thirty-three, then, not counting Carter. And not one of them is rational enough to cooperate. Now how do we find out who it is?"

"I still think it's Carter. He was concentrating mentally on keeping the broom up, and that kind of mental effort must be the basis for telekinesis. Of course, he wouldn't know that his mental effort was responsible. But I'll give you odds he was the only one concentrating on it. No one else paid any attention to him."

"It's impossible to say just where a patient's attention might be," Doctor Manley said testily. "Anyway, we can't settle the problem by arguing about it. Now let's think of some tests, and get back in there and apply them."

They isolated Sidney Carter and his broom, and Carter refused to perform. He sat sullenly on the floor, his round face drooping mournfully, and muttered unintelligibilities to himself. He brightened when half a dozen of his fellow patients were placed with him. A short time later he was balancing the broom, and Hollinger clocked it suspended in mid-air for fourteen seconds.

"That's a piece of luck," Doctor Manley said. "Got him the first try. Now we'll remove one patient at a time, until the broom stops balancing."

"Wait a minute," Hollinger objected. "This doesn't prove

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it isn't Carter. It may just prove that Carter won't perform without company."

"I still think—but then, you may be right."

"We need a control. Another group of six or seven."

"I suppose it wouldn't do any harm," Doctor Manley admitted.

They brought in a second group, and a third, and a fourth and fifth. And Sidney Carter continued his balancing act, and at some point in each performance the broom defied gravity. Hollinger clocked a record thirty-two-second suspension.

Manley and Hollinger returned the patients to Ward Fifteen, and walked back across the hospital grounds to their bench.

"Don't look so damned smug," Manley snapped.

"Sir?" Hollinger said innocently.

"All right. So it *has* to be Carter. Either that, or there's at least five of them. And that is impossible. If one human being out of a million has telekinetic ability—and I doubt that—we would hardly find five in one ward of a mental hospital."

"I was considering it from another angle," Hollinger said. "Why should we find even one in a mental hospital?"

Manley looked at him sharply. "Are you hinting at a theory? Mental unbalance a necessary prerequisite for *psi* powers?"

"Not a necesary prerequisite. A probable resultant. Look at it this way. A person who is a sensitive telepath from birth would hardly have a thought to call his own. He'd be bombarded continuously by other mentalities, and it would be impossible for him to develop normally. Even if he did maintain a slight edge of mental balance, one afternoon in Yankee Stadium would drive him violently insane."

"Your conclusion?"

"If you want to find a first-rate telepath, look in a mental hospital. Of course, you'll have a hell of a time differentiating between him and the other patients."

"Telepaths are supposed to be able to shield themselves from other minds."

"That's a theory, too. Besides—would a baby be able to shield itself? Even if it had ability to shield itself, it would be a mental case before it ever learned how to use that ability."

"None of which helps us with our telekinetic patient."

"Perhaps not," Hollinger admitted. "But then—he may

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be a telepath, too. We haven't any idea what other power he may have. And even if he isn't, unexpressed telekinetic powers could result in insanity. A person with great musical talent might become a mental case digging ditches. A person with great telekinetic talent might become a mental case if he didn't understand his telekinetic urges and didn't know what to do about them."

"Let's not lose our perspective on this," Manley said dryly. "We have one mental patient, and we are only positive about one *psi* power. Let's check on Sidney Carter's background, and decide what to do with him."

They hurried off to the Records Section, and checked. Prior to his mental breakdown, Sidney Carter had led a normal, humdrum existence. There had been no apparent foreshadowing of his mental illness. He'd been a grocery-store clerk, a factory worker, and a bus driver. He'd had an apparently happy marriage, and raised three children. He'd been committed at the age of fifty-one, and he'd been a patient for twelve years, with no apparent improvement.

"If your theory's correct," Manley said, "he contained those urges pretty well for fifty-one years."

"What do we do now?"

"Supposing we were able to effect a cure by encouraging him to use his telekinetic ability? That would make medical history. This case will make medical history no matter what happens. Our next step is to teach the patients of Ward Fifteen a new game."

It took all of half an hour, but Manley succeeded in getting the thirty-four patients seated on the floor in a large circle, legs stretched out in front of them. Charlie Andrews stood in the center of the circle, with a large beach ball. He pivoted slowly, selected a patient at random, and rolled the ball. It bounced into the patient's lap, and he clutched it stupidly. Charlie stepped forward, and traded him a piece of candy for the ball.

"They have a child-like selfishness," Manley said. "As soon as it gets across to Carter that possession of the ball is worth a piece of candy, we'll see a telekinetic in action."

Charlie rolled the ball again. And again. The patients began to register interest, even excitement, as they leaned forward to watch. One patient leaped to his feet to grab the ball, and was ruled out of order. The game continued until

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

each of the thirty-four had received the ball, and won his piece of candy.

"We'll try again tomorrow," Manley said.

They tried again on the next day, and the day after that. They kept trying. And on the sixth day the inexplicable happened. The rolling ball suddenly hooked to the left, leaving an eager patient empty-handed while his neighbor claimed the prize. Hollinger and Manley stared, and turned to stare at each other. The winner was not Sidney Carter.

"I'll take over," Manley told Charlie.

He rolled the ball slowly in the same direction. It made the same sharp curve, stopped abruptly, and rolled back across the circle, picking up speed. There was a new winner, also not Sidney Carter. It didn't make sense—or did it?

With trembling fingers, Hollinger got out his notebook and recorded two names.

The patients were bouncing excitedly, rapt enthusiasm on their faces. The ball began to do crazy things. Untouched, it shot back and forth across the circle, swerving to avoid Doctor Manley in the center. The patients' attitude changed to one of strenuous concentration. The ball had a dozen changes of direction before a patient finally seized it and claimed his prize.

Doctor Manley placed the ball in the center of the circle, and walked away. The ball began to roll. From one corner of the room Hollinger followed its wild shifts of direction, and frantically recorded names. The patients were shouting hysterically. The ball came to a complete stop in the center of the circle and remained there, spinning. For a moment nobody moved.

A patient suddenly scrambled for the ball. Another grabbed his foot and sent him sprawling. And suddenly all the patients were on their feet, screaming, struggling. The ball shot into the air, and stayed there. A bench lifted slowly upwards and hung at a precarious angle. The piano moved a foot out from the wall. Untouched, it slowly began to play a descending scale, from the top of the keyboard. Another scale started at the bottom of the keyboard and moved up rapidly, and both were lost in crashing dissonances. The piano moved another foot.

Manley and Charlie Andrews were waving their arms and shouting orders. Hollinger dropped his notebook into his pocket, and moved out to join

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

them. A little Italian suddenly lifted into the air and plopped onto the hovering bench, his face blank wtih surprise. The bench dropped away from him, and he rose slowly to the ceiling, descended slowly. The piano leaped into the air, and dropped with a splintering thud. Candy erupted from Manley's pocket, and the patients made a reckless, flailing scramble for it.

"We'll need help!" Manley shouted.

Hollinger nodded, and started for the door. A bench hurled past him, turning slowly, end over end, and crashed into the wall. Hollinger suddenly found himself moving backwards, his feet dragging on the linoleum. A polisher whizzed past him on a lightning circuit of the room. Manley and Charlie Andrews stood helplessly among the wildly gesticulating patients, unable to move. The locked door suddenly flew open, and banged against the wall.

The patients made a dash for it, and crowded through. All around the room objects crashed to the floor. Hollinger, Manley and the attendant were suddenly released. Charlie tore into the hallway after the patients, and was propelled back into the room. The door slammed shut. When they tried to open it, they found it locked.

With fumbling fingers Hollinger unlocked the door. The attendant raced down the hallway after the patients. Manley and Hollinger dashed out a side door and across to the administration building. Hollinger stood looking out the window of Manley's office while the Associate Director yelped frantically into a telephone.

The patients of Ward Fifteen were trooping across the lawn, towards the main gate. A guard moved out to intercept them, and ended up perched on a branch of a tree, thirty feet in the air. The gate swung open, and the patients poured out into the street. A parked car leaped sideways, and there was a shrill screech of brakes as a bus crashed into it. The traffic signal in front of the main gate began to swing wildly, snapped loose, and soared in a long arc to crash to the pavement fifty feet away.

The laughing crowd of patients moved across the street to the small business section, and paused in front of a drug store. Candy, cigarettes and assorted merchandise fluttered through the doorway. A pedestrian suddenly found him-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

self hanging two feet off the ground while his feet churned frantically and the contents of his pockets rained onto the sidewalk. The patients scrambled for the coins, and the pedestrian managed to retrieve his wallet and a few other essentials before he fled.

Manley finished his telephoning, and joined Hollinger at the window.

"Eighteen," Hollinger said. "I counted eighteen. And there are probably more."

Manley groaned. "Latent telekinetics. All they needed was the proper stimulus, and like damned fools we gave it to them. Now what do we do? We're going to have one hell of a time catching them, and even if we do, we can't put them in a locked room. And I don't suppose a jacket would hold one of them long. We could nail the door shut. Do you suppose they can work nails out of wood? No kind of lock or bolt would keep them in. Maybe we'll have to weld cells for them."

Sirens sounded in the distance. Hospital attendants were racing across the vast grounds towards the main gate. A police car roared up to the curb and an officer leaped out, revolver in hand. He stared stupidly as the revolver soared into the air and stayed there, discharging itself skyward at irregular intervals.

"Once we get this mess straightened out," Manley said, "we're going to do some thorough research. I want to know how those particular men all got into Ward Fifteen. I can't believe it's a coincidence. And I can't believe that telekinesis is something contagious, or . . ."

"Or that *any* insane person has latent *psi* powers?" Hollinger said.

Manley shuddered. More police cars arrived. A fire truck skidded to a halt. The firemen started for a hydrant with their hose, and the hose was seized with convulsions, jerked out of their hands, and slowly ascended vertically into the air. A policeman landed with a thud on the top of his squad car and stretched out there, unable to move. Another unwisely threw a tear gas bomb, and it curved gracefully and went off at his feet.

The office door jerked open, and a nurse hurried in. "Doctor Manley!" she panted.

"What now?" Manley said wearily.

"The oddest thing just happened over in the Women's Division. Ward Thirty-two. A woman was balancing a box on her head, and . . ." **THE END**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Man On The Island

By BRYCE WALTON

ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

No doubt many people think of fantasy as an individualized—and thus rather restricted—literary structure. Actually, no other form of the written word has a wider range. Fantasy reaches from "Alice in Wonderland" to "Dr. Jekyl and Mr. Hyde"; from Hans Christian Andersen to Henry James and his "Turn of the Screw." A great deal of fantasy's power lies in the leeway it gives the writer for creation of mood. In this story, Walton has achieved a strangely fragile mood without deserting stark reality.

THERE he is," Larry said. He pointed to a table under a lurid painting of the sunset. She turned to look at their victim. The so-called Duke of Capercaillie, Joseph Kronmetz, was disappointing. He was short, paunchy, bald and damp looking. He promised to be a bore. But then, wasn't everything?

Even the Casino of the Palms with its can-can dancers was a bore. The Riviera was the dreariest bore of all. "He doesn't," she said, "look any more like a Duke than you do."

"He is. And I've arranged for you to meet him in ten minutes."

She remembered the last one, an old American who dealt in textiles, someone named MacDonagh. Larry had had to kill MacDonagh. Somehow, he had found out her identity, and he had to be killed. Thinking of that made her feel tired, truly exhausted.

"I hope he isn't a phony," she said.

"Do phonies drop ten million francs on a croupier's table then walk away before the wheel stops, saying, 'Why wait, I know it's an unfortunate bet?'"

She felt a tinge of interest and looked at Kronmetz again. Somehow, he did appear vaguely rich. He still stared at her with those colored glasses while he sipped brandy. She and Larry were down to a mere 60,000 francs. "He already seems interested," she said.

"If he sees you," Larry said, smiling, "he sees only the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

image I painted of you for his hungry little soul. He's blind."

She felt irritated, for she had spent some time preparing herself for a seduction. She shrugged creamy white shoulders and crossed long slim legs. "He can't *see* me?"

"He's probably a master of the touch-system by now, and he's more the spiritual type I understand. Anyway, what does that matter? This is the time when we make the big haul."

Perhaps this would be simpler and less exhausting and frustrating. Being appreciated by men whose sensitivity to her charms only resulted in estrangement was depressing. Though one had to live well, the means had sometimes been unpleasant. Particularly in the case of MacDonagh.

"He lives," Larry said, "in some big ancestral pile on an island. He's here looking for the woman of his dreams. He's been doing this periodically for years. He always comes to Quinze, convinced that it attracts the most beautiful women in the world. The fact that he keeps returning means that he has always been either completely disappointed, or that he is easily bored."

She crossed her legs and smiled as her hazel eyes darkened to this unexpected challenge.

"I doubt if you'll bore him, but in case you might, the idea is to work fast. He must have plenty of family jewels and cash stashed away out there. Get it and get out. Unless, of course, you con him into something more permanent and rewarding over a longer haul. He has a heart ailment, so in case of trouble, you know what to do. I'll give you the stuff before you take off with this guy."

"I couldn't do that."

"This time you may have to. I won't be around. Just put it in his coffee or wine, and it's diagnosed as heart-failure. Don't pretend you couldn't do it. You were as much responsible for what happened to MacDonagh as I was." Larry finished his brandy and looked at his watch.

"Who, or what, am I this time, Larry? Better face me in on the routine."

"You're a lover of poetry and the arts, and you've written stuff, too. You're a lover of sweet, sad song. This Duke's an eccentric, blinded during the war, used to write poetry. An aesthete. But poetry is his first love. You have the invisible attributes. You have a nice cultured voice, a certain familiarity with the arts. Here,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I've prepared a little dope sheet for you."

He handed her a sheet of paper upon which was typed a number of quotations from famous poets. "The Duke's blind. He won't know you're reading it off. He's looking for something special. Feel him out."

He handed her a ragged pamphlet.

"Remember poor starving Jacque in Paris? Not a bad poet, maybe. Who knows? I'm sure the Duke never heard of Jacque. Who has? He had a hundred of these printed up for his friends—those who could buy him a meal. I had another binding put on it. You are now Drusilla de Vere, author of *Flowers on a Plain*. If he wants to hear any of your stuff, this is it. Keep some of it back in case he wants you to compose something new. Then you won't have any trouble."

Larry was clever. He was ugly and mean and without human principles, but he was clever at arranging lucrative liaisons. She detested him, and herself, but he objected sometimes to her undisguised distaste for him.

"Kronmetz is probably insane," Larry said. "But that should make it simpler."

Then Larry introduced her to Kronmetz as, "The lovely lady I was telling you about," and dismissed himself.

The Duke asked her what she wanted to eat and drink, then ordered for her. She felt uneasy under his blind yellow-lensed stare.

"You do have a beautiful voice," he said, hesitantly.

"Thank you. I was told that you love beauty."

"Yes. But I can't see it now. I used to see it. But remembering isn't easy. Without sight, memory dulls. The eyes, Miss de Vere, are the windows of the soul."

"But the soul is immortal."

"I'm trying to preserve mine. You appreciate poetry? You are a poet, I understand. Who are your favorites?"

Quickly she scanned the paper and said her favorites were Shelley, Byron and—James Joyce. How did he get in there, she thought?

She forced herself to quote as though from memory, " 'Yet I endure. I ask the Earth, have not the mountains felt? I ask yon Heaven, the all-beholding Sun, has it not seen? The sea, in storm or calm, Heaven's ever-changing Shadow, spread below, have its deaf waves not heard my agony? Ah me! alas, pain, pain ever, for ever.' "

Kronmetz was impressed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

His voice was excited. "'How sweet it is to sit and read the tales of mighty poets and to hear the while sweet music, that when the attention fails, fills the dim pause.'"

"Lovely," she said.

"It's a coincidence, Miss de Vere. But I like Joyce's poetry. His prose is pretentious and a bore, but his poetry is so incredibly delicate. Like floating crystals."

"Yes," she said, then read from the quotation labeled Joyce. "'Strings in the earth and air make music sweet, strings by the river where the willows meet.'"

"Beautiful," Kronmetz said. "Would you mind reciting a bit of your own work?"

Quickly she opened the pamphlet of Jacque's poetry and read, "'And strange ruins on a plain, and strange sockets in the brain where mosses spring and twisted flowers bring fragrance and self-devouring pain. Red hawk and hawk white, red dove, white dove, devour each other. And each to the other is red or white, hawk or dove, devouring with madness or with love. There are strange ruins on a plain. A scarlet flower that dies, and stones on stones that rise and again fall. Strange ruins on a plain."

Unexpected fear moved in her. She half-believed those disquieting words were her own. She had read it well, with feeling and she had the sudden uneasy sensation that the feeling had been, in part at least, genuine.

Kronmetz's yellowish lenses gazed at her face for perhaps five minutes. Then he whispered, "*Magnifique!* What visual imagery. It is so rare. I want to hear more, much more. We shall get along very well."

"It's from a collection," she said. "Called *Flowers on a Plain.*"

"So we all are," he said. "And the seasons are so short. Tell me," he said, leaning across the table, "what do you see *now?*" His face was tense.

She felt a momentary doubt so frightening it was like paralysis.

"Now?"

"I cannot see, you understand? I want you to see all this for me. What do you see?"

She pressed one hand close against her stomach, and breathed deeply. She looked across the smoke of the Casino of the Palms. Something deeper than fear moved inside her, waves of threatening giddiness. She didn't want to see anything, she thought. She had been so many places, seen so much, and had seen noth-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing. She felt unsafe, suddenly and frighteningly alone, yet the challenge had to be met.

She tried to remember how it had been long ago, when she sat alone, looking at life, feeling it, even touched with awe because of it.

"The gay music," she began haltingly, "turns blue and somberly cuts the air. No, it consumes the air and is part of it like smoke. It is part of the air, part of a sickness. It is the cry of the hounded. It fills this weary rich cafe. These people have no tongues. There is no voice in them but this dead music. This smoke, this music fills their lungs as they suck in cigarettes. Their eyes are dull with the rhythm and their hearts bump with it. They have no voice and they long for a voice. But they sit dumb and suck clamor into their lungs and silently breathe it out. You see no faces, you see only the smoke and a glitter in it, the glitter of legs, mouths, and horns, and you let yourself slowly through it, in blue that swirls and mixes with a smoky air."

She leaned against the table. She touched the napkin to her perspiring lips. She felt his hands holding one of hers and she was looking into the yellow lenses.

"Let's leave this place," he said. "Do you want to stay with me?"

"Yes," she said.

"Can you drive a car?"

"Yes."

"Good. We shall drive past the Mount to the Cape of Palms. You will describe it to me, the cold black Mediterranean moonlight."

The many rooms of the Chateau de Capercaillie were still museums. The pile of stones merged with blue sky and blue ocean, seemed to float like an illusion above the peninsula. The servants lived in their own shacks down the curve of the beach. "They are," Kronmetz said, "crude but necessary intrusions."

She had a room, large and damp, lined with books and rare paintings. It had a stone fireplace. It had casement windows opening over the sea.

Their first night together out there, they sat in a dark room. He never touched her, but asked her to tell him how the sun set, the way stars appeared breaking out, the effects of moonlight on the water.

"You must be beautiful," he said. "Look at yourself there in the mirror. Stand there and make me see you."

She felt weak, as if she had been drugged. She had to lean

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

against the heavy bedpost as she looked at unfamiliar contours, naked and blurred in the glass.

She knew that she had not honestly looked at herself for years, had almost forgotten what she had been long ago when she had looked at herself. She was not the same now.

"I see a sad song," she said slowly, "that tries to erase a dull day. There's a painted smile looking out of a pale winter. Useless love, ghosts haunting an old closet."

She saw other forgotten images, too. The faces of men whom she had made love to and turned into dupes and fools and she heard her and Larry's laughter as they counted the take. And there was the dead dancing face of MacDonagh laughing at her, taunting her.

Then she looked up at the concerned face of Kronmetz bending over her. She lay on the bed. She couldn't remember ever having fainted before.

The drugged feeling persisted. She walked with Kronmetz day and night. It was like a dream. She couldn't get away from Kronmetz. She found a fortune in jewels, and managed to accumulate handfulls and hide them in her suitcase. But she couldn't get away from Kronmetz.

He would lie beside her, touching her the way he might have tried to feel the color in a painting. He didn't demand physical love. For what purpose, he said, would we lie here mouth to mouth? A rehearsal for tomorrow's show? He didn't want her body.

He only wanted her eyes.

"You see things the way I saw them once," he said. "Your eyes will the windows of my soul."

He talked with sudden flares of rage of the others, the countless others, who had promised so much, and had been able to see nothing but banalities explained in cliches and platitudes.

She began to wonder what had happened to all the others. Larry hadn't mentioned that. She was frightened and sent letters to Larry when the mailboat left for the mainland. He was staying at the Hotel Napoleon.

She had the jewels, a fortune in jewels. But how was she to escape? She had to stay with Kronmetz night and day. The servants wouldn't speak to her.

Twenty-four hours a day she saw things for Kronmetz. The paintings. The peasant boy on a bicycle. A ship on the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

horizon. The waves on the rocks. The gulls over the water.

Time became a fearful necessary and constant exposure to new and strange sensations.

The world seemed to have altered, tilted, and she had to fit into it, see it the way he wanted her to see it. She was afraid to drift out of it even for a minute.

How he hated those others who had failed to see things right.

The night, she said, stretched from day to day like a long tunnel. The cliff was no longer the cliff she had seen a thousand times, but something that trimmed its dress with ruffled ocean surf and wore a shawl of whitened seabird's nests.

The sleepy sun didn't sink, it prepared for the rape of night. The moon in tattered clouds begged star-dust from the sky. The spider wove a spun-glass spell. The bird traced a paragraph of song on the windy blue page of the sky. The grass was stitched by the weeds' luxuriant yawn. Rain was a patient dogged fisherman digging up worms.

It was as if she had never really heard rain before on leaves, or the way tired stars couldn't help blinking their eyes. Or the marks a cat's tongue left on the back of a hand. Or the appearance of a shelf of books. Or of how fire was alive and how a dog slept before it dreaming.

Rain drops made circles on water. Rain was a mystery, and it teased above the ground a small green head and made it flower. She saw a hand in water. A woman swinging brown fish from a dangling string. The sand like tears of fine gold dust. Fingers of mist grasped out in greedy expectation. Along the beach, the lace on coral fans, and black pearl eyes simpering like falling crystal bubbles, and gold darting in mouldering haunted castles.

After weeks passed there was no answer from Larry.

She dug the phial from the bottom of the suitcase. She forgot MacDonagh. Her only escape would be to poison Kronmetz. But the phial was empty.

Perhaps Kronmetz had found it, and emptied it. She never found out why it was empty. She got out the small pearl-handled .25-caliber pistol. It had no shells in it. The chamber had been emptied.

She tried to escape, carrying the jewels in a small handbag. She was caught and brought back by a sullen man and woman smelling of sea-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

weed and stale fish, who never said anything.

Kronmetz only asked why she had left him, left him in his pitiful darkness.

She wrote more letters to Larry at the Hotel Napoleon. She knew they got off all right. She sneaked down to the wharf and saw that they got on the mailboat. She tried to get the man who ran the mailboat to take her to the mainland, but he refused.

Two weeks later, she knew Larry wasn't going to answer. She had no idea why. Perhaps he had been arrested.

That night there was a storm. Kronmetz made her see it for him. It seemed that she had never seen a storm before this one.

The storm came this time with flashing weapons, javelins of light, with blows of fists on mountains sounding like rolls on a drumhead. And then the storm went away, and it left the beaten mountains drenched in the blood of the gasping, wounded skies and wrapped in green shrouds.

Later he wanted her to see the mountains for him.

They were giants pushing away a fretful sky.

He had left her alone a few minutes. He had not said anything for several days. He was nervous and irritable. He fell into rages.

Once he sobbed like a child.

He came into the shadowed room and she turned with a gasp of fear.

He shuffled toward her like a hesitant child, a timid child trying to see in the dark.

"You should be happy here, but you aren't, are you?"

"Yes, I'm happy," she said. She didn't dare tell the truth.

"You aren't happy at all. You don't really love beauty and if you do—then why aren't you happy?"

"I said I was happy."

"You see beauty anyway, even if you don't appreciate it as you ought to. Did you ever think that you would die some day? Then what about me? Where will I be then?"

She felt the wind from the open window against her shoulders as she backed away from him. She had not been sure, but now she could see the knife in his hand.

"You will die, or you might even run away," he said.

He ran his hand over her face and touched her eyes. . . .

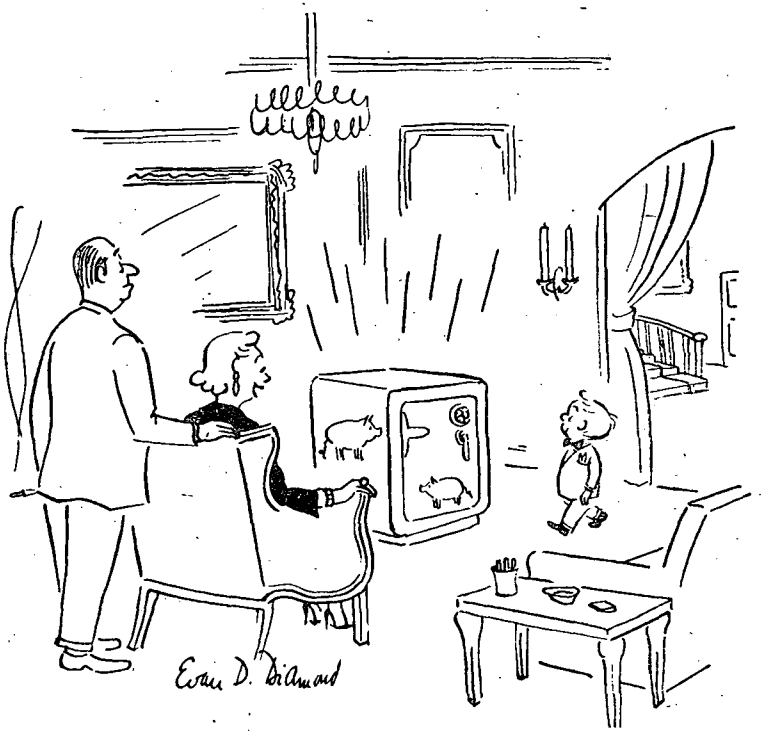
Larry Doran boarded the Paris Express for the Spanish border. He would spend a long leisurely season at Majorca. He thought of her for a while and then decided to forget her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

completely. As far as he was concerned, the past had been a hectic hand-to-mouth business and he was through with it. He was rich. The world was his oyster.

She had gotten to be a bore. Still, he wondered what had happened to her out there on Kronmetz's private little island. A lot of people wondered about what had happened to some of those other women the Duke had picked up in Quinze and taken over there, but most of them were tramps anyway, like she had always been, and no one really cared.

All Larry knew or cared about now was that Joseph Kronmetz had paid him a fortune for her eyes. THE END



"Your father's bought you a new toy, dear . . . a piggy bank."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WORLD OF TRAITORS

By ROG PHILIPS

Things were rough in Voria; worse in Sokia. The governments of both nations were riddled with spies. Even the prime ministers were suspect. The big questions were —who was trying to betray who to whom? For what reasons? And how long had it been going on?

KER OOM turned the pages of the pictorial weekly, studying the reproductions of pictures taken through the nine thousand inch satelite telescope. They were closeups of the closest inhabited planet to Par, fifty-light years away. Planet Two, the astronomers had named it. These pictures, some of them, were of geometrical patterns of dots that could only be street lights in cities at night.

That was proof enough, but in addition pinpoints of light had been observed on Two traveling at speeds of two to six hundred miles an hour, proof of air travel. Two was the third planet out from its sun and had one large moon. The planet had the same period of revolution as Par, was larger but had the same surface gravity, and had the same radiation intensity from its smaller sun because it was closer to it. Even its year was about that of Par's—only three days shorter.

Par, of course, was the seventh planet out from its sun, and had two moons. It was interesting that there was another inhabited planet so similar to Par . . .

Ker Oom put aside the magazine and leaned back, closing his eyes. He wondered if there were one government, two, or many, on planet Two. He smiled to himself. Very soon now Par would have only one government. The end of the road was in sight. Today he, Ker Oom, had taken the oath of office and become President of Voria. In the morning he would go to the Capitol Build-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They watched, grim-faced, as a world exploded.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing and begin his first day as President of Voria, second largest nation on Par.

He smiled. Tonight the people of Voria slept peacefully in their beds, never suspecting that he, the man they had elected to their highest office, was not a Vorian, but a Sokian spy who had spent forty years rising to the position he now held. And now Sokia would soon rule the planet.

Ker didn't know yet just what the details of the final plan were. He would get his orders—perhaps straight from Sonji himself—in a few days, no doubt. In his own mind though Ker Oom had built up a pretty good idea of what would happen. In a few weeks Dictator Sonji would precipitate a few incidents of a threatening nature, and he, President Oom, would send stern notes to Sonji, so worded that if Sonji did such-and-such he, Oom, would have to declare war and plunge Voria and Sokia into global conflict. All the thousands of Sokian spies like himself in command positions in the armed forces, and even in the Senate, elected by the people, thanks to the fact that both political organizations had Sokian spies in control of them and able to dictate who the two parties would choose for candidates, would ensure the Vorian attack and the defense would be so poorly conducted that it would quickly fail. Then he, President Oom, swiftly, before anyone in Voria could realize what was happening, would surrender unconditionally to Sokia, and Sonji would become the ruler of the whole planet.

In a matter of a few days the surrender could be completed, and Sokian troops could take over the nuclear bomb stockpiles of Voria and transport all those bombs to Sokia. From that moment on Sokia would forever rule the other nations because making new bombs was too gigantic an enterprise for any nation or underground group to ever hope to make them in complete secrecy.

It made Ker Oom dizzy to realize that world domination could be such a simple and permanent thing, thanks to the awful power of the thermonuclear bombs which made one bomb have the destructive power of a million man force with non-nuclear weapons, coupled with the fact that no group anywhere could hope to make such bombs in secret. That last fact made successful revolt impossible forever.

And actually it was the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

only hope for peace the planet had, short of all-out suicidal war. This way was merciful, swift, with a minimum loss of life. Once conquest was an accomplished fact all nations could relax from their war tensions, including the betrayed Voria.

No more costly nuclear bombs would have to be made because Sonji and the Central Committee, and all who came after them forever, would have all there were—enough to wipe the planet out of existence if they all went off at once. Fear would be a thing out of ancient history in a few centuries. Maybe Sonji or his successor from the Central Committee when he died of old age might have to order one or two of the bombs dropped before the rest of Par came to recognize the futility of trying to bring back the old conditions. After that, Peace forever. Peace and Law, stemming from the Central Committee.

Well, no use wasting mental effort speculating about the details. They would come from Sonji in a few days and he, President Oom, would follow them to the letter. Meanwhile all Voria could sleep in peace, unaware that it would soon be jerked out of its complacent stupidity.

A wave of pity settled over Ker Oom for this nation of Voria. It was impossible not to admire these Vorians once you knew them, and he knew them as well or better than they knew themselves—as only a foreigner who has spent a lifetime of study of an enemy people can know them. They were a grand nation, lacking only the clear thinking necessary to seeing the logical way of forever ending global wars with little risk of failure and almost no destruction involved. Or perhaps they could see it but didn't have the courage to act.

Yes, he knew these Vorians well—actually better than he knew his own people, the Sokians. It had been forty years since he had left Sokia to be smuggled into Voria and assume the identity of a Vorian according to the carefully standardized routine of having each spy have an authentic history. When he had first taken the identity of the original Ker Oom, born in Boln, Sankas, he had not dreamed of the possibility of ever becoming the key to the whole plan. And now the village of Boln boasted of being his birthplace!

He had played his role so well that sometimes he almost believed it. Sometimes he had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to think to remember his own name, the one that would really go down in history as soon as Sonji ruled the planet.

He was born Arj Rad, in the little hamlet of Crewst at the foot of the Berl Mountains, sixty years ago. It seemed almost unreal. But his first twenty years of life in his native land were still quite vivid sometimes — especially from his tenth to his twentieth years when he was being crammed to the ears with the million and one details that could enable him to pass as a native Vorian with no possible suspicion. Those had been grueling years, years that he had hated at the time, but now he could view them fondly, knowing their purpose, seeing their fruits, feeling the strength that comes from rigid discipline.

Those ten grueling years had seemed like they would never end. Then, without warning, they had, and a few days later he had swam from a submarine to a spot on the west coast of Voria where two spies were waiting to pick him up. Three days later he was inland, already Ker Oom to those around him, an aspiring young law student fresh out of college. He had never bothered to question what had become of the real Ker Oom. Possibly that identity had been chosen because the real Ker Oom had died just then. Or maybe the real Ker Oom had been killed and buried in quicklime. It was unlikely that he would have been spirited out of Voria and imprisoned for life in Sokia.

After that beginning, forty years ago, he had advanced rapidly both in public life and in the secret organization of the spy complex, learning to feel the double pulse of the two hearts that beat in the affairs of the nation it was his destiny to destroy.

Ten years after coming to Voria he had met Silya, a spy who had been in Voria only three years. She had been born near the Berl Mountains too, and their common memories drew them together. Eventually permission came through for them to marry. They had had four children, and none of those children would ever suspect that their parents were alien spies, even after Voria surrendered, because the true cause of defeat would never be known. President Oom would still be President, "permitted to retain his office by the good graces of Dictator Sonji," and no breath of suspicion would ever be directed his way.

It was all perfect. Perfect

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in a way that no process of a democracy can ever be perfect with its divided authority and multiplicity of mind.

Ker Oom felt a gentle touch on his arm and opened his eyes, and smiled up at his wife Silya. She said, "Don't you think you should go to bed, dear? Tomorrow may be a critical day for you."

"Yes, of course," he said. He reached up and took her hand. They looked into each other's eyes, sharing their secret as they had always shared it, unspoken.

The reporters, press photographers, movie cameras, TV cameras, and secret service agents were getting in one another's way, jockeying for favored positions. Ker Oom, flanked by secret service agents assigned to protect him, strode up the wide concrete walk to the Capitol Building steps, went up to the third step where he would be above the crowd on the lawns, and turned to face the cameras. His memorized off-the-cuff speech, received through the usual channels and freshly memorized less than an hour ago, was short and to the point.

Looking directly into one camera lense after another, his expression stern and filled with grim determination, he said in his smooth oratorical voice, "My friends, at this moment I am about to take over my responsibilities and obligations as President and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces of this, our land, the citadel of freedom, and in the days to come I will face my duty squarely, whatever it may be. If—may God forbid—armed aggression comes to threaten our destruction, I will—God willing—meet force with mightier force, with crushing force. But if—God grant—I can steer our ship of State through the shoals of threatening catastrophe into the safe and secure harbor of peace, I shall do so. *But no compromise with honor shall swerve me in my loyalty until death to my native land.*"

Ker Oom's voice shook with the intensity of his inner conviction as he completed his brief speech. He did love his native land, the land of his birth. He would have given his life unhesitatingly for Sokia if it had ever been necessary. But such a sacrifice would never be necessary. Not only he, but the Vice President and almost half of the Senate were Sokian spies. They controlled Voria absolutely, and if they were all killed tomorrow Sokian spies

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

controlled the political parties of Voria and had enough spy power in reserve to be sure all the new key officials would also be dedicated Sokians.

He had slept little during the night, anxious to have the morning come. One of his first duties, he felt sure, would be to get the list of all Vorian agents operating in Sokia and send it to Dictator Sonji so they could be quietly rounded up. That would be the necessary first step before the phoney war could be started, and only the President and the head of the Vorian Secret Service would have access to that list.

He didn't know yet if the head of the Secret Service was a Sokian spy or not. Perhaps before the day was over he would know.

He smiled into the cameras and waved to the crowds on the lawns, then turned and walked up the wide shallow steps to the entrance to the Capitol Building. The outgoing President would be waiting for him. A good part of the day would be spent in private with him, going over any secret agreements or alliances Voria might have, and any other State secrets only the President could have access to.

Ker Oom chuckled as he entered the building. A few minutes later he and ex-President Corti shook hands cordially before more cameras, and each made a brief speech into those cameras for the TV broadcasts. Then they turned their backs on the cameras and went into the President's private office, and closed the door.

"Well, Ril," Ker said heartily, "It's too bad you lost the election this time. In my books you've been a damned good man in the office. I only hope I can do half as good a job."

"You can probably do much better," Ril said. "You're a good man. I've watched your career for the past several years, and I suspected quite some time ago that you were the best Presidential timber around to succeed me. I wasn't a bit surprised that you won."

"Thanks," Ker said. "I suppose you're anxious to get this out of the way, now that you're out."

"Naturally," Ril smiled. "There's quite a bit of stuff you have to go through today before you can properly orient yourself to your office. Secret agreements, policy structure inherited from my administration, the Secret Service global setup. So let's go down

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to your real office where all of that is kept."

"My real office?" Ker said, startled.

Ril grinned and went to the wall, pointing to a certain spot that was nothing but blank wall. "Under here is the lock," he said. "It can only be worked by the President himself. No one else.

"What we have to do now is this: I place my hand over this area and a scanner examines it microscopically. While my hand is there you place yours next to mine. The scanner takes it in, too, memorizing it and automatically associating it with mine, with which it is already familiar. It takes six thousand points of familiarity for the lock to act. Because of the association of our two hands it will pick up those six thousand points of familiarity from your hand alone, next time. In six months the electronic memory of my hand will be forgotten through disuse, and only your hand will open the lock."

Ker placed his hand beside Ril's. Two minutes later Ker felt the wall move away from his hand. It moved back an inch and slid aside, revealing an elevator. When he and Ril stepped into the elevator the panel slid back into place swiftly and silently.

"You will notice," Ril said, pointing, "that there is one way glass so that you can make sure no one is in your upper office before stepping out—though actually that isn't necessary since the panel won't open if someone is in the room who shouldn't be. When we just opened it together it wouldn't have worked at all if you hadn't also placed your hand on the lock scanner because you would have been an extra party in the room."

The elevator dropped silently and swiftly, and stopped so gently that Ker wasn't aware that it wasn't still moving, when the new panel slid aside.

"We're seventy-five feet underground here," Ril said, striding into the large room filled with filing cabinets. "This is the secret heart of the nation, known only to Presidents in office, and," he grinned knowingly, "ex-Presidents.

"You'll probably spend an hour or two down here almost every day. It will take you a few weeks to know everything you have to know, and of course if you get stuck I'm the only one you can call on. I'll leave you a phone number

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that can reach me wherever I happen to be in a hurry. For the first thirty days I will be always within touch. That will be my final obligation to office. I think the best way to cover ground in a hurry is to explain the outline of the Western Alliance Treaties to you."

"Okay," Ker said, feeling a little impatience for Ril to be gone so he could dive in uninterrupted.

Ril grinned knowingly. "You're in for a lot of surprises, Ker," he said. "This treaty business is absolutely fool proof and goes far beyond anything you could imagine in your wildest dreams."

Ker smiled smugly. "I'm afraid my wildest dreams are a trifle—shall we say—conservative?" Inwardly he chuckled.

Ril went to a filing cabinet and pulled open a drawer, carelessly. "You wouldn't believe it," he said, "but in this drawer alone are the government's original copies of all the existing treaties. There's even half a dozen signed by Dictator Sonji himself! The ones that should interest you first though are those of the Western Alliance. They concern primarily the problem of nuclear bomb storage."

Ril pulled out a thick folder and carried it over to a desk and opened it. "The big problem, you see," he said, "was that of a sudden and successful invasion of Voria by an enemy. If that happened and all our bombs were in Voria, the enemy could at once gain possession of them and the war would be over."

"Oh?" Ker said calmly, though his heart was pounding. He was thinking worriedly, *Oh, if these dirty patriots have spiked our chance to get all the bombs . . .*

Ril was not looking at Ker now, but at the map he had just spread out on the desk. "The Western Alliance nations, as you can see, are colored yellow on this map, and the locations of the bomb storage depots are the black circles. The numbers under the circles are the number of each inventory sheet listing the numbers and types of bombs in that depot. Each depot is a Vorian depot, of course, but the officers in charge of each depot have instructions for coordination and reprisal in case the Vorian Government is destroyed or falls into enemy hands. And *only the President* knows where all the storage depots are." Ril glanced up, flashing Ker a grin, then added, "The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ex-President too, you know, but one of your first duties will be to change things enough so that what I know will be obsolete. The government of each Western Alliance nation of course knows the location of each depot within its borders, but not the numbers and types of bombs stored there.

"Only you will know *all* the details and the locations of all the depots. The thing to bear in mind is that the bombs have to be spread around so that the destruction of any one government will leave enough power in the surviving ones to lick any enemy."

"Of course," Ker said, making a mental note to get all the bombs back into Voria as soon as possible. This was a complication that Dictator Sonji probably didn't know about. He would have to be informed before the day was out.

Ril folded up the map and placed it in the folder with the treaties, and put the folder back in the drawer. "You can study it all in your leisure," he said carelessly. "You get the idea behind it okay?"

"I think so," Ker said. "If I don't I'll get in touch with you later."

Ril went to another file cabinet and pulled open a drawer. "This," he said, "Is something even more important than bombs. It's the file of *all* Vorian agents and spies in every country all over the world. This is something that not even your head of Secret Service will know. He will never know more than ninety percent of the names in here, and of course you have final say on everything in that department."

The ex-President slammed the drawer shut and pulled open the one below it. "This one is also top secret, and only you have *all* the names in it. This contains the names of all enemy agents in Voria. Each of them is permitted to go about his business for some reason or other, and it's all here. And below it is the file of all native Vorians who have switched their loyalty to some other country."

For another two hours Ril continued opening drawers and giving a rundown on their contents. By the time he was through Ker was finding it very difficult to conceal his impatience.

Finally Ril said, "Well, that's all. I know you're impatient for me to get out so you can go to work. I really wish I could stay and watch you. You're in for the biggest surprise of your life before

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the day is over, when you get into all those files."

Then he was gone.

Ker Oom watched the door of the elevator slide shut, and the indicator above the door go up and stop at the top, remain there for a few seconds, then start back down. He waited until it had come down and the door had slid open, revealing the elevator to be empty.

Then he laughed, softly, triumphantly. His eyes shining, he turned and surveyed the room, the many filing cabinets. He was here, in the secret heart, the vital spot. How many years had it taken? Forty? Yes, and the teamwork of thousands of spies, infiltrating all the key posts, pulling the behind-the-scenes strings year after year. What mastery in intrigue there had been.

Always, when it was necessary, the stooges, the native born, the traitors, had been sacrificed on the alter of public indignation—but never one of the dedicated, none of those like himself who had spent their childhood in Sokia mastering the language and customs of Voria so that they could serve their country in a foreign land, passing as a native. And now—

Success!

He walked among the filing cabinets, caressing them fondly. He paused at the cabinet containing the drawer of names of Vorian agents in foreign countries. Under it was the drawer of alien agents in Voria. Was he himself, perhaps, listed in there?

He chuckled at the foolish notion. One shred of suspicion against him and Ril would have seen to it that he was exposed as soon as he entered the Presidential primaries. Still . . .

A capricious mood posessed him. Why not look?

He pulled open the drawer and looked. Ker Oom was not among those whose papers were in there, nor any other Oom. But wait! The names in here were all Sokian. If he was listed at all it would be under his real name, and that was—Arj Rad, of course.

He spread apart the dense file at the beginning of the R's and flicked the sheets of paper slowly. Raaf, Racji, Racuji, Rad. But the first name was Aar. Ker knew him, a very valuable man, only in Voria for five years now. He flicked to the next sheet.

And there it was. Arj Rad. Birthplace, Crewst, West Berl State, Sokia.

Suddenly Ker's forehead

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was moist with nervous perspiration. How stupidly careless Ril had been. Here, all the time, had been the information that could have ruined the plans of forty years, but Ril had not made the connection.

The trouble was that this file was not cross indexed with Vorian name, of course. The only way Ril could have discovered that he was an enemy spy would have been for him to search through the whole file. There it was on the second line. Name being used in Voria . . . Ker Oom.

Intensely interested, Ker took the sheet out of the file and went over and sat down at the desk. Lord, the information on it was detailed. It began with his first entry, place and date, and the address where he had first lived. That had been a crummy hotel. He had only lived there two weeks and then had moved, but it was all there on this paper. The bottom of the page only took it to ten years ago.

Abruptly he turned the sheet over—and there it was. His eye caught it instantly. Two-thirds of the way down the page was the last notation. Inaugurated as President—and the date was yesterday!

For a long horrible sixty seconds Ker Oom's thoughts froze. How could this be?

This entry must have been made by Ril himself not earlier than yesterday afternoon. Was the man insane? A split personality, one part of him not knowing what the other part did?

The only other explanation was that—Ril was a traitor to his country! He had knowingly turned his country over to an enemy. The man should be made to pay for this! To be a spy in an enemy country, working a lifetime to bring victory to your native land was a noble thing, but to hold the highest office in your native land and then betray your country was unthinkable.

In fact, *it was unthinkable.* It couldn't happen. There had to be some other explanation.

Of course, it was equally unthinkable that Ril was like him, a native of Sokia. If that were the case, victory would have been possible shortly after Ril had taken office, years ago. Sokia would already be in control of all Par.

Of course! Ker Oom slapped his forehead at his stupidity. Ril had a secretary who kept entries up to date. That secretary must be a Sokian agent with a distorted sense of humor, to put all this on paper under the nose of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

acting President yesterday. If Ril had seen it he could have somehow stopped Ker from assuming office even though he had already taken the oath of office. That stupid secretary would have to be punished.

Ker was perspiring freely now, and using his handkerchief to wipe his forehead dry every minute or so. What careless disregard of common sense! Or was it?

Somehow the thought of a secretary with a distorted sense of humor didn't ring true. Was Ril, the ex-President, a Sokian? Against common sense, that seemed the only answer.

There was a way to find out. If he were, and since he had Ril's history in his files, he would have his own—*if* he were.

With a determined glint in his eye, Ker Oom took his sheet back and inserted it in the file, then began at the beginning and slowly turned over each sheet, reading until he found the Vorian name being used by the Sokian agent.

There were a lot of them. It took him an hour to come to the name, Bej Kodi. And it was all there. Ril was a Sokian named Bej Kodi.

It was insane. It was absolutely insane. Frowning, he took Bej Kodi's sheet from the file and returned to the desk to read it over. Kodi's history was very similar to his own. He had been born on the plains of Koki, in southern Sokia, and had entered Voria in the usual way, by submarine. From that point on their two careers were quite identical.

But it didn't make sense!

Ker shook his head in slow bewilderment. There had to be an explanation of some kind. Maybe things hadn't shaped up right during Ril's administration for the final act that would make Sokia and Dictator Sonji ruler of all Par. But that didn't sound right either. Surely, in eight years, it could have been maneuvered . . .

An empty feeling settled in the pit of Ker's stomach. If the time hadn't been right during Ril's administration it might not be during his own, and to be in the key spot at the culmination of his career and see nothing happen would be hard to take.

Maybe the problem of the bombs had something to do with it. If so—a feeling of contempt for Ril's abilities rose in him—he would solve the problem of getting possession of all the bombs and bring success.

A shadow of doubt entered

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his thoughts. If Ril had not been able to solve it in eight years, could he solve it himself? Ril was not exactly a fool . . .

Anger at the Vorians possessed him. They were too shrewd, too smart. They had thought of everything and countered everything.

Did the bombs matter?

Once Sokia had Voria in its pocket it could rule the world anyway, and with exact information on the locations of the storage depots which he, Ker, could provide, it would be a simple matter for the combined might of Sokia and Voria to lick the other members of the Western Alliance and get all the bombs.

But that had been equally true eight years ago, under Ril.

Could it be? No. It was insane.

It was utterly impossible—

But . . .

No.

How silly could he get?

Nevertheless all it would take would be . . .

Ridiculous—yet . . .

In sudden, dogged, decision, he went back to the files and put Bej Kodi's paper away and closed the drawer. Then he pulled open the drawer above it and began with the first sheet and slowly began reading.

It took almost two hours. Eventually he came to the sheet that began, "Voor Cardna, born in Mulka, Puta, Voria." And on the other side of the sheet, Dictator Sonji!

Ker Oom's mind reeled under the blow of the realization that the man who held absolute authority over his native land was a spy, a native of Voria!

"No wonder—!" Ker Oom said aloud, horrified.

Somehow, some way, he would have to rescue his country from this dastardly treachery! But to whom could he go?

He would have to alert the entire spy personnel of Sokians in Voria as to the true state of affairs first. He would have to appoint one of them Ambassador to Sokia with the mission of assassinating Sonji.

The thing wrong with that was that Sonji must certainly have the duplicate of this complete file and would know the man calling on him was a loyal Sokian. Probably this Voor Cardna who ruled Sokia as Sonji had his own network of spies right here on his native soil that could keep him informed of things.

The point was that Sonji

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

undoubtedly knew that a native Sokian was in the seat of power of his own Voria, so why hadn't he done something to expose the enemy spy system that infiltrated and controlled the government of his own country?

Ker Oom paced back and forth in the underground room, trying to think. Two things were obvious now. Ex-President Ril had known Sonji was really a Vorian spy and had done nothing about it—or was unable to do anything about it. Sonji had by the same token known that Ril—and now he—was an enemy agent, and had done nothing about it. And from the thickness of the file on Vorian agents in Sokia another thing was becoming clear. In all probability *native Vorians dedicated to the service and safety of their homeland were the government of Sokia.*

Then why had they permitted native Sokians to receive training as spies and come over here to get control? There had to be an answer to this insanity. There had to be a way out of it.

What he would have to do would be to suddenly invade Sokia and wipe out every Vorian spy over there. But—send Vorian bombs and troops to fight his own native land? He shook his head. He couldn't possibly send these Vorians against his native land, order the enemy to kill his own people.

Nor would Sonji ever send Sokian troops and bombs to invade his own land.

It was a stalemate! Incredulous, unable to accept the obvious and inescapable true state of affairs, Ker Oom spread it out in his mind and scanned it for loopholes—but there were no loopholes.

Even if he wanted to break the stalemate by sudden aggression against his own land, Sokia, it was quite certain that Sokia's spies in Voria would conclude that he had gone mad and would keep him from doing it.

The final truth came to him. Absurd as it seemed, *war was an impossibility!*

In his mind's eye he looked at this vision, this concept of peace. He blinked his eyes and shook his head violently, but the vision remained. War was an impossibility.

Then why not keep things this way? He flinched away from the traitorous thought. His whole life had been dedicated to making his homeland triumphant over the whole planet and now he was having thoughts of leaving it in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

clutches of the enemy. The *clutches?*

Suddenly he laughed aloud. Clutches cliches. He was trying to superimpose the old concepts on the new and it wouldn't work. The real joke of the matter was that only he and Dictator Sonji knew the truth. Ex-President Ril too, of course, but he would keep his mouth shut. He undoubtedly believed in it and wanted it to continue.

A sense of peace flowed into him. For the first time in his life he was at the end of conflict, no longer driven by the fear of future disaster for his native land.

There were probably others who knew. This state of stalemate must have come into being by treaty—secret treaty that would have seemed high treason to anyone except those with the vision to grasp it.

Ker Oom went to the file drawer which Ril has so carelessly said contained a few treaties with Sokia. He thumbed through the treaties—and there it was. The Treaty of Permanent Peace. Just under the title was a brief quotation.

It read, "A wise judge, when confronted with the problem of dividing an inheritance between two brothers, handed down the ruling that one brother should do the dividing and the other brother should have first choice."

Ker Oom chuckled. There was nothing, absolutely nothing, within his power to do, which would not help Voria and hurt his native Sokia.

Suddenly he had had enough for one day. He put the treaty back in the file and went to the elevator.

A minute later he stepped out into his upper office. The sun was shining brightly through the windows. The leafy branches of a tree swayed slightly from a gentle breeze. A saucy little bird perched on the window ledge for a moment then darted away.

It was good to be President. Ker Oom wondered if he could be a wise one.

He sat down at his desk and flicked on the desk TV. A newscast was on. It was halfway through a rebroadcast of his inauguration. He watched himself as his voice intoned, "But if—God grant—I can steer our ship of State through the shoals of threatening catastrophe . . ."

Ker Oom smiled. He had not known then what he knew now.

A picture flashed onto the screen. It was a picture now

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

familiar to him, of a portion of the surface of planet Two, that inhabited planet fifty light years away. The voice on the speaker said, "Watch closely. We are going to show you a movie of what is unmistakably a plutonium bomb explosion on planet Two."

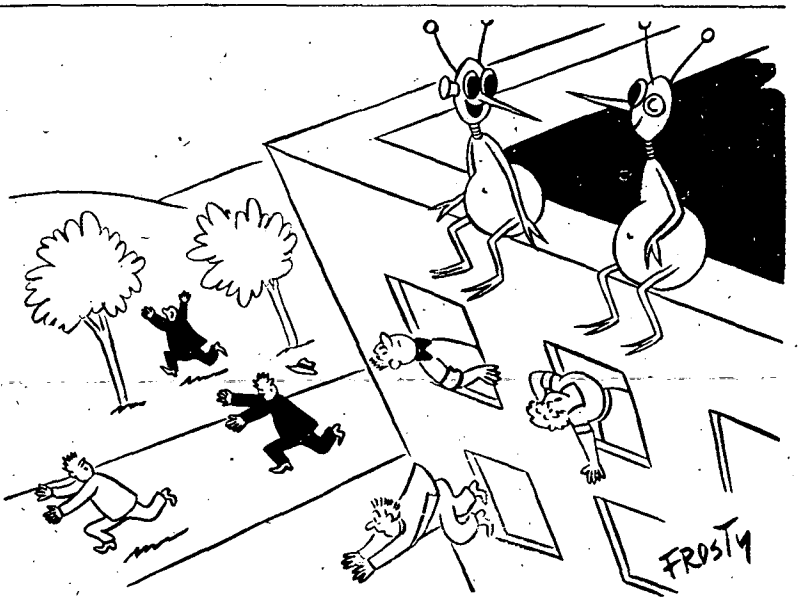
The still picture suddenly became a movie. A group of islands just off the coast of a continent became centered in the screen, and then enlarged until just one of the islands covered the screen, wavering considerably—probably from refraction in Two's atmosphere. A dot was moving toward the center of the screen over the land. Suddenly a spot of boiling light appeared. Ker Oom watched it. It was, definitely, a Plutonium bomb explosion.

So now Two also had the bomb. Now? *That was fifty years ago.*

Right now planet Two, third out from its sun and with one large moon, had had the nuclear bombs for fifty years. Had those people—or monsters or whatever they were—learned how to live with it in that time?

Or did — perhaps — planet Two no longer exist . . .

THE END



"The natives seem restless tonight!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Good and Evil merge in a silver spinning ... and a sign on the forehead shall be the mark ... and Eternity will beckon a man on

DAMNATION MORNING

By FRITZ LEIBER

ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

TIME traveling, which is not quite the good clean boyish fun it's cracked up to be, started for me when this woman with the sigil on her forehead looked in on me from the open doorway of the hotel bedroom where I'd hidden myself and the bottles and asked me, "Look, Buster, do you want to live?"

It was the sort of question would have suited a religious crackpot of the strong-arm, save-your-soul variety, but she didn't look like one. And I might very well have answered it—in fact, I almost did—with a hangover, one-percent humorous, "Good God, no!" Or—a poor second—I could have studied the dark, dust-burnished arabesques of the faded blue carpet for a perversely long time and then countered with a grudging, "Oh, if you insist."

But I didn't, perhaps because there didn't seem to be anything like one percent of humor in the situation. Point One: I have been blacked out the past half hour or so—this woman might just have opened the door or she might have been watching me for ten minutes. Point Two: I was in the fringes of DTs, trying to come off a big drunk. Point Three: I knew for certain that I had just killed someone or left him or her to die, though I hadn't the faintest idea of whom or why.

Let me try to picture my state of mind a little more vividly. My consciousness, the sentient self-aware part of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

me, was a single quivering point in the center of an endless plane vibrating harshly with misery and menace. I was like a man in a rowboat in the middle of the Pacific—or better, I was like a man in a shellhole in the North African desert (I served under Montgomery and any region adjoining the DTs is certainly a No Man's Land). Around me, in every direction—this is my consciousness I'm describing, remember—miles of flat burning sand, nothing more. Way beyond the horizon were two divorced wives, some estranged children, assorted jobs, and other unexceptional wreckage. Much closer, but still beyond the horizon, were State Hospital (twice) and Psycho (four times). Shallowly buried very near at hand, or perhaps blackening in the open just behind me in the shellhole, was the person I had killed.

But remember that I knew I had killed a real person. *That* wasn't anything allegorical.

Now for a little more detail on this "Look, Buster" woman. To begin with, she didn't resemble any part of the DTs or its outlying kingdoms, though an amateur might have thought differently—especially if he had given too much weight to the sigil on her forehead. But it was no amateur.

She seemed about my age—forty-five—but I couldn't be sure. Her body looked younger than that, her face older; both were trim and had seen a lot of use, I got the impression. She was wearing black sandals and a black unbelted tunic with just a hint of the sack dress to it, yet she seemed dressed for the street. It occurred to me even then (off-track ideas can come to you very swiftly and sharply in the DT outskirts) that it was a costume that, except perhaps for the color, would have fitted into any number of historical eras: old Egypt, Greece, maybe the Directoire, World War I, Burma, Yucatan, to name some. (Should I ask her if she spoke Mayathan? I didn't, but I don't think the question would have fazed her; she seemed altogether sophisticated, a real cosmopolite—she pronounced "Buster" as if it were part of a curious, somewhat ridiculous jargon she was using for shock purposes.)

From her left arm hung a black handbag that closed with a drawstring and from which protruded the tip of silvery object about which I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

found myself apprehensively curious.

Her right arm was raised and bent, the elbow touching the door frame, the hand brushing back the very dark bangs from her forehead to show me the sigil, as if that had a bearing on her question.

The sigil was an eight-limbed asterisk made of fine dark lines and about as big as a silver dollar. An X superimposed on a plus sign. It looked permanent.

Except for the bangs she wore her hair pinned up. Her ears were flat, thin-edged, and nicely shaped, with the long lobes that in Chinese art mark the philosopher. Small square silver flats with rounded corners ornamented them.

Her face might have been painted by Toulouse-Lautrec or Degas. The skin was webbed with very fine lines; the eyes were darkly shadowed and there was a touch of green on the lids (Egyptian? —I asked myself); her mouth was wide, tolerant, but realistic. Yes, beyond all else, she seemed realistic.

And as I've indicated, I was ready for realism, so when she asked, "Do you want to live?" I somehow managed not to let slip any of the flippant answers that came flocking into my mouth, I realized that this was the one time in a million when a big question is really meant and your answer really counts and there are no second chances, I realized that the line of my life had come to one of those points where there's a kink in it and the wrong (or maybe the right) tug can break it and that she knew all about this—that as far as I was concerned at the present moment, she knew all about everything.

So I thought for a bit, not long, and I answered, "Yes."

She nodded—not as if she approved my decision, or disapproved it for that matter, but merely as if she accepted it as a basis for negotiations —and she let her bangs fall back across her forehead. Then she gave me a quick dry smile and she said, "In that case you and I have got to get out of here and do some talking."

For me that smile was the first break in the shell—the shell around my rancid consciousness or perhaps the dark, star-pricked shell around the space-time continuum.

"Come on," she said. "No, just as you are. Don't stop for anything and—" (She caught the direction of my imme-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

diate natural movement) "—*don't look behind you* if you meant that about wanting to live."

Ordinarily being told not to look behind you is a remarkably silly piece of advice, it makes you think of those "pursuing fiend" horror stories that scare children, and you look around automatically—if only to prove you're no child. Also in this present case there was my very real and dreadful curiosity: I wanted terribly (yes, terribly) to know whom it was I had just killed—a forgotten third wife? a stray woman? a jealous husband or boyfriend? (though I seemed too cracked up for love affairs) the hotel clerk? a fellow derelict?

But somehow, as with her "want to live" question, I had the sense to realize that this was one of those times when the usually silly statement is dead serious, that she meant her warning quite literally.

If I looked behind me, I would die.

I looked straight ahead as I stepped past the scattered brown empty bottles and the thin fume mounting from the tiny crater in the carpet where I'd dropped a live cigarette.

As I followed her through the door I caught, from the window behind me, the distant note of a police siren.

Before we reached the elevator the siren was nearer and it sounded as if the fire department had been called out too.

I saw a silvery flicker ahead. There was a big mirror facing the elevators.

"What I told you about not looking behind you goes for mirrors too," my conductress informed me. "Until I tell you differently."

The instant she said that, I knew that I had forgotten what I looked like; I simply could not visualize that dreadful witness (generally inhabiting a smeary bathroom mirror) of so many foggy mornings: my own face. One glance in the mirror . . .

But I told myself: realism. I saw a blur of brown shoes and black sandals in the big mirror, nothing more.

The cage of the right-hand elevator, dark and empty, was stopped at this floor. A crosswise wooden bar held the door open. My conductress removed the bar and we stepped inside. The door closed and she touched the controls. I wondered, "Which way will it go? Sideways?"

It began to sink normally.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I started to touch my face, but didn't. I started to try to remember my name, but stopped. It would be bad tactics, I thought, to let myself become aware of any more gaps in my knowledge. I knew I was alive. I would stick with that for a while.

The cage sank two and a half floors and stopped, its doorway blocked by the drab purple wall of the shaft. My conductress switched on the tiny dome light and turned to me.

"Well?" she said.

I put my last thought into words.

"I'm alive," I said, "and I'm in your hands."

She laughed lightly. "You find it a compromising situation? But you're quite correct. You accepted life from me, or through me, rather. Does that suggest anything to you?"

My memory may have been lousy, but another, long unused section of my mind was clicking. "When you get anything," I said, "you have to pay for it—and sometimes money isn't enough, though I've only once or twice been in situations where money didn't help."

"Three times now," she said. "Here is how it stacks up: You've bought your way, with something other than money, into an organization of which I am an agent. Or perhaps you'd rather go back to the room where I recruited you? We might just be able to manage it."

Through the walls of the cage and shaft I could hear the sirens going full blast, underlining her words.

I shook my head. I said, "I think I knew that—I mean, that I was joining an organization—when I answered your first question."

"It's a very big organization," she went on, as if warning me. "Call it an empire or a power if you like. So far as you are concerned, it has always existed and always will exist. It has agents everywhere, literally. Space and time are no barriers to it. Its purpose, so far as you will ever be able to know it, is to change, for its own aggrandizement, not only the present and future, but also the past. It is a ruthlessly competitive organization and is merciless to its employees."

"I. G. Farben?" I asked, grabbing nervously and clumsily at humor.

She didn't rebuke my flippancy, but said, "And it isn't the Communist Party or the Ku Klux Klan, or the Avenging Angels or the Black Hand,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

either, though its enemies give it a nastier name."

"Which is?" I asked.

"The Spiders," she said.

That word gave me the shudders, coming so suddenly. I expected the sigil to step off her forehead and scuttle down her face and leap at me —something like that.

She watched me. "You might call it the Double Cross," she suggested, "if that seems better."

"Well, at least you don't try to prettify your organization," was all I could think to say.

She shook her head. "With the really big ones you don't have to. You never know if the side into which you are born or reborn is 'right' or 'good'—you only know that it's your side and you try to learn about it and form an opinion as you live and serve."

"You talk about sides," I said. "Is there another?"

"We won't go into that now," she said, "but if you ever meet someone with an S on his forehead, he's not a friend, no matter what else he may be to you. *That* S stands for Snakes."

I don't know why *that* word, coming just then, gave me so much worse a scare—crystalized all my fears, as it were—but it did. Maybe it was only some little thing, like Snakes meaning DTs. Whatever it was, I felt myself turning to mush.

"Maybe we'd better go back to the room where you found me," I heard myself saying. I don't think I meant it, though I surely felt it. The sirens had stopped, but I could hear a lot of general hubbub, outside the hotel and inside it too, I thought—noise from the other elevator shaft and, it seemed to me, from the floor we'd just left—hurrying footsteps, taut voices, something being dragged. I knew terror here, in this stalled elevator, but that *loudness* outside would be worse.

"It's too late now," my conductress informed me. She slitted her eyes at me. "You see, Buster," she said, *"you're still back in that room.* You might be able to handle the problem of rejoining yourself if you went back alone, but not with other people around."

"What did you do to me?" I said very softly.

"I'm a Ressurectionist," she said as quietly. "I dig bodies out of the space-time continuum and give them the freedom of the fourth dimension. When I Resurrected you, I cut you out of your lifeline

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

close to the point that you think of as the Now."

"My lifeline?" I interrupted. "Something in my palm?"

"All of you from your birth to your death," she said. "A you-shaped rope embedded in the space-time continuum—I cut you out of it. Or I made a fork in your lifeline, if you want to think of it that way, and you're in the free branch. But the other you, the buried you, the one people think of as the real you, is back in your room with the other Zombies going through the motions."

"But how can you cut people out of their lifelines?" I asked. "As a bull-session theory, perhaps. But to actually do it—"

"You can if you have the proper tool," she said flatly, swinging her handbag. "Any number of agents might have done it. A Snake might have done it as easily as a Spider. Might still—but we won't go into that."

"But if you've cut me out of my lifeline," I said, "and given me the freedom of the fourth dimension, why are we in the same old space-time? That is, if this elevator still is—"

"It is," she assured me. "We're still in the same space-time because I haven't led us out of it. We're moving through it at the same temporal speed as the you we left behind, keeping pace with his Now. But we both have an added mode of freedom, at present imperceptible and inoperative. Don't worry, I'll make a Door and get us out of here soon enough—if you pass the test."

I stopped trying to understand her metaphysics. Maybe I was between floors with a maniac. Maybe I was a maniac myself. No matter—I would just go on clinging to what *felt* like reality. "Look," I said, "that person I murdered, or left to die, is he back in the room too? Did you see him—or her?"

She looked at me and then nodded. She said carefully, "The person you killed or doomed is still in the room."

An aching impulse twisted me a little. "Maybe I should try to go back—" I began. "Try to go back and unite the selves . . ."

"It's too late now," she repeated.

"But I want to," I persisted. "There's something pulling at me, like a chain hooked to my chest."

She smiled unpleasantly. "Of course there is," she said. "It's the vampire in you—the same thing that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

drew me to your room or would draw any Spider or Snake. The blood scent of the person you killed or doomed."

I drew back from her. "Why do you keep saying 'or'?" I blustered. "I didn't look but you must have *seen.* You must *know. Whom did I kill?* And what is the Zombie me doing back there in that room with the body?"

"There's no time for that now," she said, spreading the mouth of her handbag. "Later you can go back and find out, if you pass the test."

She drew from her handbag a pale gray gleaming implement that looked by quick turns to me like a knife, a gun, a slim scepter, and a delicate branding iron — especially when its tip sprouted an eight-limbed star of silver wire.

"The test?" I faltered, staring at the thing.

"Yes, to determine whether you can live in the fourth dimension or only die in it."

The star began to spin, slowly at first, then faster and faster. Then it held still, but something that was part of it or created by it went on spinning like a Helmholtz color wheel—a fugitive, flashing rainbow spiral. It looked like the brain's own circular scanning pattern become visible and that frightened me because that is what you see at the onset of alcoholic hallucinations.

"Close your eyes," she said.

I wanted to jerk away, I wanted to lunge at her, but I didn't dare. Something might shake loose in my brain if I did. The spiral flashed through the wiry fringe of my eyebrows as she moved it closer. I closed my eyes.

Something stung my forehead icily, like ether, and I instantly felt that I was moving forward with an easy rise and fall, as if I were riding a very gentle roller-coaster. There was a low pulsing roar in my ears.

I snapped my eyes open. The illusion vanished. I was standing stock still in the elevator and the only sounds were the continuing hubbub that had succeeded the sirens. My conductress was smiling at me, encouragingly.

I closed my eyes again. Instantly I was surging forward through the dark on the gentle roller-coaster and the hubbub was an almost musical roar that rose and fell. Smoky lights showed ahead. I glided through a cobblestoned alleyway where cloaked and broad-hatted bravoes with rapiers swinging at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

their sides turned their heads to stare at me knowingly, while women in gaudy dresses that swept the dirt leered in a way that was half inviting, half contemptuous.

Darkness swallowed them. An iron gate clanged behind me. Bluer, cleaner lights sprang up. I passed a field studded with tall silver ships. Tall, slender-limbed men and women in blue and silver smocks broke off their tasks or games to watch me—evenly but a little sadly, I thought. They drifted out of sight behind me and another gate clanged. For a moment the pulsing sound shaped itself into words: "There's a road to travel. It's a road that's wide . . ."

I opened my eyes again. I was back in the stalled elevator, hearing the muted hubbub, facing my smiling conductress. It was very strange—an illusion that could be turned on or off by lowering or raising the eyelids. I remembered fleetingly that the brain's alpha rhythm, which may be the rhythm of its scanning pattern idling, vanishes when you open your eyes and I wondered if the roller-coaster was the alpha rhythm.

When I closed my eyes this time I plunged deeper into the illusion. I burst through many scenes: a street of flashing swords, the central aisle of a dark cavernous factory filled with unknown untended machines, a Chinese pavilion, a Harlem nightclub, a square filled with brightly-painted statues and noisy white-togaed men, a humped road across which a ragged muddy-footed throng fled in terror from a porticoed temple which showed only as wide bars of light rising in a mist from behind a low hill.

And always the half-music pulsed without cease. From time to time I heard the "Road to Travel" song repeated with two endings, now one, now another: "It leads around the cosmos to the other side," and "It leads to insanity or suicide."

I could have whichever ending I chose, it seemed to me—I needed only will it.

And then it burst on me that I could go wherever I wanted, see whatever I wanted, just by willing it. I was traveling along that dark mysterious avenue, swaying and undulating in every dimension of freedom, that leads to every hidden vista of the unconscious mind, to any and every spot in space and time—the avenue of the adventurer freed from all limitations.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I grudgingly opened my eyes again to the stalled elevator. "This is the test?" I asked my conductress quickly. She nodded, watching me speculatively, no longer smiling. I dove eagerly back into the darkness.

In the exultation of my newly realized power I skimmed a universe of sensation, darting like a bird or bee from scene to scene: a battle, a banquet, a pyramid a-building, a tatter-sailed ship in a storm, beasts of all descriptions, a torture chamber, a death ward, a dance, an orgy, a leprosary, a satellite launching, a stop at a dead star between galaxies, a newly-created android rising from a silver vat, a witch-burning, a cave birth, a crucifixion . . .

Suddenly I was afraid. I had gone so far, seen so much, so many gates had clanged behind me, and there was no sign of my free flight stopping or even slowing down. I could control where I went, but not whether I went—I had to keep on going. And going. And going.

My mind was tired. When your mind is tired and you want to sleep you close your eyes. But if, whenever you close your eyes, you start going again, you start traveling the road . . .

I opened mine. "How do I ever sleep?" I asked the woman. My voice had gone hoarse.

She didn't answer. Her expression told me nothing. Suddenly I was very frightened. But at the same time I was horribly tired, mind and body. I closed my eyes . . .

I was standing on a narrow ledge that gritted under the soles of my shoes whenever I inched a step one way or another to ease the cramps in my leg muscles. My hands and the back of my head were flattened against a gritty wall. Sweat stung my eyes and trickled inside my collar. There was a medley of voices I was trying not to hear. Voices far below.

I looked down at the toes of my shoes, which jutted out a little over the edge of the ledge. The brown leather was dusty and dull. I studied each gash in it, each rolled or loose peeling of tanned surface, each pale shallow pit.

Around the toes of my shoes a crowd of people clustered, but small, very small—tiny oval faces mounted crosswise on oval bodies that were scarcely larger—navy beans each mounted on a kidney bean. Among them were red and black rectangles, proportionately small—police cars

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and fire trucks. Between the toes of my shoes was an empty gray space.

In spirit or actuality, I was back in the body I had left in the hotel bedroom, the body that had climbed through the window and was threatening to jump.

I could see from the corner of my eye that someone in black was standing beside me, in spirit or actuality. I tried to turn my head and see who it was, but that instant the invisible roller-coaster seized me and I surged forward and—this time—down.

The faces started to swell. Slowly.

A great scream puffed up at me from them. I tried to ride it but it wouldn't hold me. I plunged on down, face first.

The faces below continued to swell. Faster. Much faster, and then . . .

One of them looked *all matted hair* except for the forehead, which had an S on it.

My fall took me past that horror face and then checked three feet from the gray pavement (I could see fine, dust-drifted cracks and a trodden wad of chewing gum) and without pause I shot upward again, like a high diver who fetches bottom, or as if I'd hit an invisible sponge-rubber cushion yards thick.

I soared upward in a great curve, losing speed all the time, and landed without a jar on the ledge from which I'd just fallen.

Beside me stood the woman in black. A gust of wind ruffled her bangs and I saw the eight-limbed sigil on her forehead.

I felt a surge of desire and I put my arms around her and pulled her face toward mine.

She smiled but she dipped her head so that our foreheads touched instead of our lips.

Ether ice shocked my brain. I closed my eyes for an instant.

When I opened them we were back in the stalled elevator and she was drawing away from me with a smile and I felt a wonderful strength and freshness and power, as if all avenues were open to me now without compulsion, as if all space and time were my private preserve.

I closed my eyes and there was only blackness quiet as the grave and close as a caress. No roller-coaster, no scanning pattern digging movement and faces from the dark, no realms of the DT

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fringes. I laughed and I opened my eyes.

My conductress was at the controls of the elevator and we were dropping smoothly and her smile was sardonic but comradely now, as if we were fellow professionals.

The elevator stopped and the door slid open on the crowded lobby and we stepped out arm in arm. My partner checked a moment in her stride and I saw her lift an "Out of Order" sign off the door and drop it behind the sand vase.

We strode toward the entrance. I knew what Zombies were now—the people around me, hotel folk, public, cops, firemen. They were all staring toward the entrance, where the revolving doors were pinned open, as if they were waiting (an eternity, if necessary) for something to happen. They didn't see us at all—except that one or two trembled uneasily, like folk touched by nightmares, as we brushed past them.

As we went through the doorway my partner said to me rapidly, "When we get outside do whatever you have to, but when I touch your shoulder come with me. There'll be a Door behind you."

Once more she drew the gray implement from her handbag and there was a silver spinning beside me. I did not look at it.

I walked out into empty sidewalk and a scream that came from dozens of throats. Hot sunlight struck my face. We were the only souls for ten yards around, then came a line of policemen and the screaming mob. Everyone of them was looking straight up, except for a man in dirty shirtsleeves who was pushing his way, head down, between two cops.

You know the sound when a butcher slams a chunk of beef down on the chopping block? I heard that now, only much bigger. I blinked my eyes and there was a body on its back in the middle of the empty space and the finest spray of blood was misting down on the gray sidewalk.

I sprang forward and knelt beside the body, vaguely aware that the man who had pushed between the cops was doing the same from the other side. I studied the face of the man who had leaped to his death.

The face was unmarred, though it was rather closer to the sidewalk than it would have been if the back of the head had been intact. It was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a face with a week's beard on it that rose higher than the cheekbones—the big forehead was the only sizable space on it clear of hair. It was the tormented face of a drunk, but now at peace. It was a face I knew, in fact had always known. It was simply the face my conductress had not let me see, the face of the person I had doomed to die: myself.

I lifted my hand and this time I let it touch the week's growth of beard matting my face.

Well, I thought, I had given the crowd an exciting half hour.

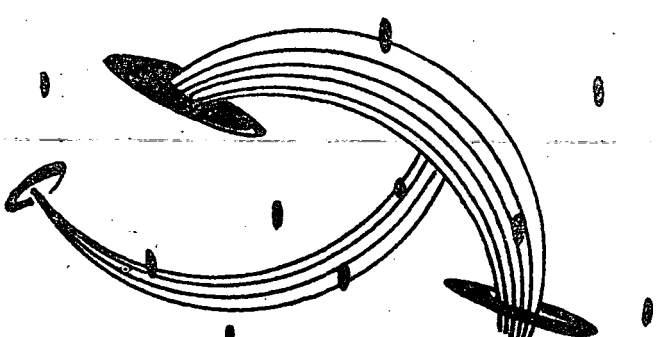
I lifted my eyes and there on the other side of the body was the dirty-sleeved man. It was the same beard-matted face as that on the ground between us, the same beard-matted face as my own.

On the forehead was a black S that looked permanent.

He was staring at my face —and then at my forehead— with a surprise, and then a horror, that I knew my own features were registering too as I stared at him. A hand touched my shoulder.

My conductress had told me that you never know whether the side into which you are born or reborn is "right" or "good." Now, as I turned and saw the shimmering silver man-high Door behind me, and her hand vanishing into it, and as I stepped through, past a rim of velvet blackness and stars, I clung to that memory, for I knew that I would be fighting on both sides forever.

THE END



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

You know the old saying, "One man's kink is another man's straight line"? Well, our hero didn't. And that was the trouble with . . .

THE KINK-REMOVER

By JACK SHARKEY

I TRIED it on a rat, first.

Under the millisecond aberrations of the tiny bulb—the sort one uses in a flashlight—the beady little eyes lost their hot glaze, and the thin, wicked mouth seemed to sag into a flabby simulation of a smile. After a few more moments, the rat was lying on its back, its hairy legs and ugly leather-thongish tail undulating upward in the air, and I seemed to detect a reedy little giggle from its pulsing throat.

Now for the crucial part. I turned off the bulb and waited, pencil poised over notebook. A minute went by. An hour. Three hours. The rat, still giggling inanely, rolled onto its feet again and waddled over to its tank of water at the rear of the cage.

Swiftly, while its back was turned, I stepped to another cage and removed a fledgling sparrow—the natural prey of these vicious rodents; if and when they come across them—from its ventilated box and popped it into the rat cage.

The sparrow kind of shivered a minute, then began to preen itself clumsily—I'd ruffled the skimpy feathers a bit in transporting it—and to flutter about the cage floor.

Then it saw the rat, and gave a sick peep and froze. The rat, hearing the sound, turned about until its eyes fastened upon the other occupant of its cage. On sighting the baby sparrow, it began its waddle again, heading for the sparrow like a clumsy express train.

The feathered newcomer

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

backed itself into a corner, its eyes bulging and a wheezing whistle seeping out of its gaping beak. The rat reached it, took its round little head between its paws, and, leaning forward with its sharp-toothed muzzle . . . Began to lick the sparrow's face.

"Success!" I fairly shrieked aloud. "All its vicious carnivorous tendencies have been destroyed!"

Inserting my hand into the cage, I separated the two, and removed the sparrow. The rat sighed, and waddled back to its water tank.

The sparrow, on examination, proved to be dead. But this slight disappointment didn't dismay me, since it turned out that the sparrow had died of heart failure. (It couldn't have *known*, after all, that the rat's intentions were amicable.) So I still counted the experiment a success, and noted as much in my lab diary.

"Granny," I said at supper-time, "the years of work and strenuous effort, coupled with many sleepless nights and the bitter scorn of my colleagues, have at last borne fruit."

"Glory be!" said Granny, clasping her withered hands. "Hallelujah! Evildoers have met their Shibboleth!"

She continued in this vein for awhile, then set about serving me my supper. Now and then, from the direction of the stove, I'd hear her ejaculate another "Glory be!" or maybe a sudden "Jehosophat!", while she stirred the soup and poured the coffee for me.

"And what," said kindly old Granny, as she sat across the table from me, "are you going to do with your invention, Athelstane?"

(Athelstane was my name. Athelstane Fritch.)

"I intend to give it—free of charge—to mankind." I said, staring into space with a dedicated look. "Let peace and joy reign forevermore upon this earth."

"You always *were* a good boy, Athelstane," Granny crooned. "I knew you'd been marked down for great things ever since the day you fell down the church steps on your head. It was like a *sign*. You have never been the same, since, you know."

I blushed under this landslide of praise. Granny could be pretty astringent with the superlatives. This gush of glory was balm to my soul.

"Shucks, Granny," I said, lowering my eyes.

"Watch your language Athelstane," said Granny.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The next day, I tried it on a mad dog.

I'd found him foraging in the alley behind the house, his jaws flecked with spume, and his eyes red-speckled and angry. However, I soon had tossed him a porkchop with a stiff dose of barbiturates in it, and had him crammed into a cage in my cellar lab.

What a wonderful specimen *he* was! The hydrophobia had just about run its course in him when I'd found him, but still, as damaged as he was, and as far gone, he soon responded to the undiscernible flicker of the bulb in his cage, and was lying fawning and panting on the cage floor. When I reached in to pet him, he didn't resist or snap, just kind of gurgled down deep in his chest and closed his eyes. Once again, the noble dog was a friend to Man.

However, the bulb could not arrest the ravages of the disease, and soon the noble dog was dead. But he'd died at peace, and so I felt the experiment was still working.

I also checked the rat again. The one dose, the day before, had been enough. He was still waddling, giggling and now and then lying on his back and waving all five extremities in the air. A good sign.

"Granny," I said at suppertime, "I do believe the Kink-Remover's effects are permanent."

"Glory be," said Granny. "What now, Athelstane?"

"Mankind is notorious in his hard-heartedness. If I were to offer to make all men good, some men might try to stop me. Vice-Barons and such, I mean. I might have to do it surreptitiously, Granny."

"No good can come of evil!" said Granny, wringing her hands and rolling her eyes. "I cannot permit it."

"But think of the benefit to mankind," I pleaded.

"It doesn't seem right, Athelstane," said Granny. "Your intent is good, but your method is reprehensible."

"Perhaps I should destroy the Kink-Remover," I said.

Granny's manner softened. "Wait, Athelstane. I shall have to think it over. When I have decided, I will let you know. In the meantime, keep testing."

"Yes, Granny," I said.

I kept testing. My next experimentee was a shrew.

These beasts are small—and rather poisonous if they should bite you—and about the most vicious animals there are, bar none.

But ten seconds under the ray and the shrew was rolling

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

about its cage in ecstasy, getting its fur quite filthy in the process. But it was a *friendly* sort of roll.

A zoologist friend of mine lent me a diamondback rattlesnake, which I also exposed to the flicker of the bulb. It coiled itself into a ball and began to hiss in a friendly manner, beating gentle time with its rattles.

In a week, I had a cat, a monkey, a hamster and a porcupine in the same cage with the rat, the shrew and the snake. Instead of fighting, they fondled one another—with a disastrous result between the monkey and porcupine—and I knew my machine was perfected. None of them had had other than the single primal dose of the Kink-Remover. I was willing to bet the effect was a lasting one.

"Granny," I said, as she set down a platter of hot corned beef before me, "there can be no doubt. The Kink-Remover's effects are lasting ones. Have you decided if I may use it or not?"

"Athelstane," said kindly old Granny, "I have decided that you *can* do it. Mere man-made laws should not stand in the way of progress. Make all men good now, repent later."

"Thank you, Granny," I said. "I shall do so tonight. The world shall soon be another heaven. Yes, another Eden . . ."

"Another Disneyland," said Granny.

It was with a light heart that I set out that night for the powerhouse, my interceptor-box clutched under my arm. It was a fine, warm evening in Spring, and I fairly skipped the distance to the fence that surrounded the vast gray building.

Herein was housed the source of all the lighting in the entire city. Once my interceptor-box was joined to the current . . . Oh Boy!

Perhaps I should take a moment to explain the Kink-Remover. Most basically, it removed kinks.

You see, I had long labored under the theory that evil was a result of malfunctioning synapses in the brain. These tiny electric linkages were setting up behavior-patterns in men, causing them to drink, and swear, and beat their wives, and play Bingo on Sunday. The patterns started forming early in life, beginning in innocent ways. Little girls would take to going without long stockings in summertime, or little boys would skip prayer-meetings because they'd broken a leg, or

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

something. Little things, but they started the kinks forming.

By the time full growth had been attained, the kinks were "set" in the person's head, with no way of removing them. Until now.

My machine was nothing more than a circuit-breaker. Hooked to an electric power-source, it would interrupt the current at appropriate intervals (intervals too tiny to be observed by the naked eye) and set up a hypno-pattern which would start removing the kinks in the head. Sort of an electronic massage. Like pouring liniment into the brain, in a way. A tiny jolt, a tinier shudder, and all the lifetime-ingrained behavior-patterns were smoothed out, until no trace remained. And you had a new citizen on your hands. Free of all stigma of his (or her) past life. Ready to begin a new career.

It was wonderful, thinking of the sweetness, goodness and just plain sit-and-sigh happiness that would soon be blossoming throughout the city. Once my interceptor-box was attached, anyhow.

And then, all over town, lights would flicker, soothe, unkink, and— The thought was too rapturous to bear.

I hastened into the City Powerhouse.

There was a man, a sort of guard, at a desk.

"Whadda *you* want?" he snarled.

"I bring good tidings!" I exclaimed. "I have come to save our city from evil!"

He seemed impressed. "Ya don't say!" he mumbled, reaching toward the handle of his pistol, where it protruded from a leather holster.

I got all choked up. Here he was, about to show me his heart was with the Cause, by possibly beating his gun into a plowshare, or something. Tears came to my eyes.

And then, suddenly, he was pointing the gun at me.

"Easy, buddy," he said, in a gentle voice, his free hand reaching for the phone. "Everything's sure gonna be okay."

"Heavens!" I said. "A minion of Satan . . . in the *City Powerhouse!*"

"Huh?" said the man.

"I had no idea," I explained, "that impish infiltration was so complete."

"Oh . . . Yeah, sure, buddy, sure," he said, reaching for that phone again.

I dared not linger.

Most foresightedly, I had attached a few dry cells to my interceptor-box, with a tiny

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bulb. I activated it at once. It gleamed at his eyes.

His hand stopped short of the phone, and suddenly he smiled. "Life," he said, "is just a bowl of cherries."

"Right!" I said, and hurried off down the hall.

Behind me, I could hear him, his voice roaring like an old-time evangelist's, saying, "Evil is no good! Evil is bad for you! Down with evil!"

Well, I sighed, it was a start. Soon the whole city would be as he was. It was a prospect the mind could hardly contemplate without a tremor of joy.

I hurried into the main power room, where the whine of the dynamos was deafening. The overpowering, giddying scent of ozone was flooding my nostrils and lungs, but I plunged to my task, hiding the box on a high metal flange of one of the air-conditioning ducts—where the Vice-Barons couldn't find it in time—and began splicing wires like mad.

And all at once, all the lights went out.

I detected the cause immediately. The guard, in his holy zeal, was busily unhooking the generators and dynamos. His voice floated up to me where I stood on the ladder beside the horizontal flange.

"Electricity is evil. *Sunlight* is the natural way! Down with man-made light!"

H'mm-. . . This was an effect I hadn't counted on. But, luckily, it played right into my hands.

The Vice-Barons would undo *themselves!* The irony of the thing was delicious. I would hook up the box, hurry home, and soon, someone would come to investigate the cause of the city-wide darkness, and turn the current back on.

And when they did— Oh Boy!

It was a bit difficult finding my way back to the house, what with the street lights all cold and dark on their poles, but there was a sliver of moon to light my way.

Soon I was safely back inside my front hall.

"Is that you, Athelstane?" said kindly old Granny.

"Yes, Granny," I said, going into the living room. I could just make out her wizened little form, in its black shawl, oscillating away in her rocker.

"Athelstane, dear," she said, in her sweet little voice, "I have gone blind. But do not fear. This was meant to be."

"Hush, Granny," said I. "You have not gone blind. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

City Light and Power has gone temporarily out of whack. That is all. Soon the light will have returned."

"Glory be," said kindly old Granny, adding for emphasis, "Hallelujah."

I left her there and hurried down to the cellar to check the animals once more, by match-light. Like the various birds and quadrupeds in that painting, "The Peaceable Kingdom," they were all huddled together in their common cage, without so much as a muted growl to show that they'd reverted to their normal viciousness. I sighed in contentment.

Then the lights came on.

The animals stirred, and began to rouse themselves from their half-slumber. I proceeded to check some of the other cages in the lab.

I had two lovebirds there—not strictly lab-animals, more like pets—which I looked in on. A funny cold finger coiled about my heart as I noticed something slightly amiss. They were at opposite ends of their cage, kicking birdseed at each other. And they were snarling.

"Horrors!" I said aloud. "The Kink-Remover! It is *too* perfect. Not only does it remove the evil synapses from Vice-Barons and their ilk, it removes the *good* synapses from even lovebirds!"

And then I had a worse thought. *I* was being exposed to the glow of the bulbs in the ceiling. At any moment should not *I*, with my near-perfect goodness, turn into a monster?

With quick presence of mind, I switched off the lights. Luckily, though the lovebirds had been affected, it took a bit longer on larger animals (like myself), so I felt that time yet remained to rectify things. On my way upstairs, I stumbled on the steps and cursed. From *me*, this was a *terrible* change. I prayed I'd get to the powerhouse on time.

"Granny," I said, dashing into the living room. "Turn out the lights, quickly!"

But Granny was not there.

From behind me came a sullen growl. I turned, and there was kindly old Granny, clutching the meat cleaver, and smiling in a disconcertingly intent manner.

"Granny," I said sternly, "you're off your rocker!"

"Glory be!" said Granny. Then she swung the cleaver.

THE END

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TORO!

By
MACK
REYNOLDS

Ah, had you been in the arena that day, you would have seen the most amazing sights . . . and afterwards; ah, what may not happen afterwards?

WWIERN was having difficulty with his Udd. It was all he could do to keep life within it and against all of his natural tendencies to do so. Prolonging the existence of a living creature when it was in extreme pain was against every civilized instinct within him but Wwiern was in no position to allow the Udd relief and escape from life's ills for at least another hour. An hour, he told himself apologetically, wasn't too much to ask of an Udd who had lived his life in comfort and security under the guidance of Wwiern's superior intellect.

The green planet was coming up rapidly, more so that the small space craft's pilot would have preferred. It took considerable concentration on Wwiern's part to activate his host's tenacles so that they reached out and dropped the telescopic wing lever.

He would be airborne now, in moments.

Another tenacle wearily touched refrigeration unit controls.

Wwiern, with exhausting exertion, brought spark to the Udd's eyes to the point where he could concentrate again on the volume before him. He checked quickly the material available on the planet beneath. Little was known he realized with the equivalent of a groan. The oxygen content, unimportant to him but defi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nitely so to his Udd; the gravity, heavy but not impossible; the vegetation, it should support life as he knew it, although his own nourishment was assimilated from the body of the host he occupied and the problem was once removed from him.

Information on animal life was practically non-existent. Intelligent life? The last time the Galactic League had checked the planet there had been signs of development of a two-legged mammal somewhat similar to the Kroos of Diocletian Two. It had reached the point of using sharpened stones for weapons and tools. There seemed possibilities that such might be utilized as a host, although he had no idea of its size and whether or not it would fit the confines of his tiny space craft.

But that would have to wait.

The atmosphere was beginning to cushion him. The dulling eyes of the Udd checked dials, meters, flickering warning lights. Wwiern forced a tenacle to activate the refrigeration units still more, friction was heating the ship dangerously.

It became a question now of setting down before all signs of life were gone from the Udd. The one situation aggravated the other. Increased deceleration, of little effect on Wwiern, in view of the almost liquid nature of his physical body, accelerated the dying process of the Udd. But there was nothing for it.

At the last split second before touching down, Wwiern spotted animal life below in a large field. With every faculty available to him; with every iota of psychic strength at his control, he forced the Udd to touch here, there, to press this, release that. They slid into a landing, an all but perfect landing, and the Udd was dead.

For a long moment Wwiern, the symbiont, held inactivity in the memory of the long years of faithful service the Udd had given him and he had returned. A symbiotic relationship must not be one of master and slave, and on the planet of his birth most certainly was not.

But there was danger in remaining in the Udd following its death. He began, then, to ease his way from its brain and out of its body using the various nasal passages in the creature's abdominal region.

Once free, and the process took several minutes, he began to take stock of his situation. His physical powers,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

without his symbiotic host, were negligible but there were two or three controls built into his craft for just such emergencies. He was able to activate the scanner and to size up the grove in which his craft had landed. To one side were various tall woody plants, all about him, vegetation much shorter. And now he could make out one of the animal life forms which had attracted him. It was a gigantic, four-legged beast, obviously herbivorous. It was a potential host, although not ideal.

Wwiern was at a loss on how to proceed. The yellow sun above, he knew, would destroy him in moments were he to expose himself to it without the protesting bulk of a host and he had no idea of how to cross the distance from ship to beast.

The problem was solved by the animal itself. The gigantic black creature, possibly half again as large as the space craft, had been pawing the ground, snorting, obviously upset by the presence of the metallic strangeness which had dropped from the skies. Now suddenly it exploded into movement and thundered down upon the intruder.

Wwiern felt the impact as a blow, felt his craft rupture, was thrown back and into a corner of the control room. He could feel, although his senses were such as usually to be focused through those of another, the impact of additional charges, of continued blows and the noises of the angry colossus.

But at least the attack served to solve the problem immediately before him. Satisfied, at last, that the enemy was *hors de combat,* the black monster stood above the wreckage, his head lowered belligerently, and within a few inches of the symbiont.

Wwiern gathered his forces, projecting quieting telepathic commands which he could only hope might be somewhat effective on this new life form, and then touched exploringly the creature's snout. The hypnosis was more effective than he had even hoped and he was able to flow into the beast's body with little more effort than would have been necessary with the Udd.

He explored rapidly the animal's structure, settling finally in the area where spine and skull met, sending tendrils out to control senses and muscles.

As he had decided from the first view, the intelligence quotient of his new host was negligible. Within a few min-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

utes he had established dominance of the beast's functions and began practicing locomotion and sensory influence.

The space craft, he decided, was a complete loss. The very best that he could hope for would be to find a more suitable host, one possessing limbs capable of delicate work, and build signal equipment that could reach out into space and request rescue.

There was equipment in the space craft, how badly damaged he didn't know, that he would undoubtedly need for such a signaling device. He activated his host and with its horns pushed the battered ship to the shade of the tall woody vegetation and then did his best to disguise it with bushes, leaves and fallen branches. The task took time in view of the clumsiness of his animal, but it might be of importance.

His immediate job, aside from keeping his host fed and watered, was to find an animal form with hands such as were possessed by the Kroons of Diocletian Two, or with tentacles such as those of the Udd. That two-legged life form mentioned in the manual—if only it had survived.

Its survival was brought home to him in brief order.

He could hear a galloping of hoofs, some animal shouting, and over the hill swept two beasts which at first he took to be as strange as any the galaxy offered. It took moments for him to control the terror within his host and prevent him from dashing off.

A noose flashed out from one of the two newcomers and settled over his host's head and was quickly drawn. Another flicked out from the second of the two creatures and his black beast was held tight. And it was not until then that Wwiern understood that the newcomers were not indeed two animals, but four. Here then was a situation somewhat similar to his own symbiotic existence.

The controling life form slipped from the back of its four-legged beast of burden and approached along the rope it had earlier thrown.

Still fighting the belligerent fear of the animal in his power, Wwiern had little time to more than realize that this two-legged creature must be the intelligent life form the Galactic League explorers had mentioned. It had evidently developed considerably.

Additional proof of that was forthcoming in moments when a vehicle, four wheeled and stinking of an internal

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

combustion engine, surmounted the hill in its turn and disgorged another trio of the two-legged intelligent life forms.

It took possibly five minutes for Wwiern and his host to be induced and forced into the back compartment of the vehicle, a task helped considerably when Wwiern discovered what the newcomers were about. It disrupted his plans not at all to be thus brought in more easy contact with the life form which was obviously most suited for him in a symbiotic relationship.

There was going to have to be some means of communication established, but that could wait. It was quite possible for him to occupy his position in a host without its knowledge and from that vantage point assimilate its means of communication and even more remote customs—although that would take time.

The ride from grove to the settlement of the two-legs was made the easier for his four-legged beast by Wwiern's relaxing presence. He did his best to sooth its outraged instincts, to loosen its muscles the better to absorb the bouncing of the poorly defined road.

The arrival at their destination was confusing even to Wwiern; there was too much to see, too much to assimilate. He had confused pictures of a large, two-legs settlement, of tall buildings, and obvious indications of a rather advanced culture. How advanced, of course, he had no way of knowing until there would be opportunity for more extensive observation.

Thus far he'd had no opportunity to come close enough to one of the two-legs to change hosts. He wondered if the animals of this world, intelligent and otherwise, slept, as did the Udd. If so, transfer would be simple.

He found himself, in the four-legged beast, housed in a small, stall-like compartment, food, in the way of dried vegetation, before them, and water to one side. To the best of his ability he calmed the animal whose brain he occupied and urged it to consume the nourishment offered.

It occurred to him suddenly that the two-legs might be carnivorous and, if so, that possibly his host was slated for death and to make food for the others.

The idea revolted him but he was able to understand it. Intelligent life developed on the various planets throughout the Galactic League from a variety of backgrounds.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Carnivora had on more than one occasion reached true civilization, although, of course, long before its achieving they had found substitutes for their meat craving. Possibly the two-legs of this planet were in the transition period, not having as yet been able to emancipate themselves from depending upon the flesh of their fellow life forms.

Still without the opportunity to switch hosts, Wwiern spent a prolonged period in the stall, unable to measure its extent although there were periods of light and dark. He directed the animal's assimilation of food and drink and took the opportunity to further study the workings of its system. It was, he decided, a fairly young animal although fully adult and in excellent physical condition. He had never before occupied a host so muscularly perfect and decided that it must be at the prime of its life expectancy.

Eventually doors were opened, a passage exposed.

His four-legged beast without need to be prompted by Wwiern trotted down the passage toward the light and freedom that indicated itself at passage end.

Suddenly, just as they emerged into the light, searing pain flooded out from the beast's shoulder. The unexpectedness of it blinded Wwiern, terrified his host, who broke into a hysterical gallop, kicking his legs up behind him.

It took a shocked moment for the symbiont to realize that someone, or something, had embedded a short metal-tipped dart into his host's shoulder. He tried to regain the control he had lost when the pain had hit, but it took long moments to achieve mastery once more.

Before them a two-legs, one of the intelligent life forms, richly clothed in startling colors, was waving a large red cape. Still swept with pain and anger, the four-legged host Wwiern dominated sped after the darting two-leg, almost catching him before Wwiern brought it back under control.

He had narrowly averted, Wwiern believed, a horrible tragedy. Undoubtedly, the two-legs had not known of the accident which had hurt and terrified the unintelligent beast. In trying to guide it, two-legs had been unaware that the beast might well have injured him.

In control again, Wwiern trotted his host back to the center of the area in which he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

found himself and took stock of the new situation.

He seemed to be centered in a large arena, hemmed in by wooden walls. To his surprise, he found himself confronting literally thousands of this planet's intelligent life forms. Thousands. They sat in rows, tier upon tier of them, beyond the wooden barrier which surrounded the arena, and were shouting and calling — obviously some form of communication.

Most were packed tightly in their seats but centering was one box that stood out in prominence and contained but a few of the spectators. One, in particular seemed the focus of their attention. Crowned with blonde hair, and obviously held in esteem — Wwiern knew instinctively she was a female—she seemed to hold distinction. Wwiern had no time to consider this further.

Another of the colorfully clad two-legs had darted out, cape in hand, and was waving it toward Wwiern's host and calling *Toro, Huh, Toro!*

Wwiern failed to understand and, in his puzzlement, allowed the animal again to escape from his domination. It burst suddenly into speed and dashed for the two-legs who side-stepped neatly, to Wweirn's relief. The beast swirled again to try at the two-legs but now Wwiern had him in hand. He trotted his host back to the arena center, considered again the various possibilities of what was developing.

Obviously, this was not what he had first thought, a simple attempt to slaughter the animal for the sake of food. One could almost believe a festival of some sort to be proceeding. The colorful clothing of the two or three men in the ring contrasted sharply with the drabness of that worn by the others.

He held tight control of his host, refusing to let it charge again although the irritating capes continued to wave and the two-legs came provocatively nearer.

A blast of what Wwiern decided must be a crude sort of musical instrument split the air and the capes retired. From a far door appeared two two-legs mounted upon four-legged ones, similar to the arrangement under which Wwiern's host had been captured in the grove. They bore long staves tipped by metal and seemed to wear metal covering on their legs.

They approached carefully and a hush descended over the multitude in the stands.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It occurred to Wwiern at this point that possibly the host in which he had taken refuge was a criminal and had come to this to be executed. But surely in such a case there would hardly be the thousands of spectators. His own race resorted sometimes, in extreme situation, to execution but certainly it was in sorrow it was performed, not in the trappings of festival.

He was shocked from his musings by his beast's sudden lunge toward one of the newcomers. He tried to assume immediate control but not before the two-leg, mounted on his steed, had leaned heavily on his metal tipped staff inserting it deeply into the muscle of Wwiern's host, into the powerful muscle of the back.

Once again agonizing pain swept over Wweirn and he felt again and again the stabbing probing of the weapon. Of a sudden there were swirling capes and then more probes and the beast in which Wwiern resided was plunging and rearing in an attempt to get to his tormentors.

It was long moments before Wwiern found himself again in domination of the animal and now he realized the position in which he stood and that of his beast.

The two-legs in the stands were screaming their excitement and their bloodlust, the blonde-headed one, the guest of the afternoon, was clapping her hands, her eyes sparkling in excitement.

He realized the position in which he and his host stood. They were being sacrificed to provide a spectacle to satisfy bloodlust and to thrill with their deaths.

For a thousand millennia the race of which Wwiern was a member had not killed in anger or in sport and seldom at all. In all his life, he himself had never killed or even remotely considered the harming of a fellow life form. This was new and beyond belief.

But deep within him the stirring of anger was there. Anger and the demand for self-defense, for as long as he occupied this host his instincts were all to protect it. He remembered now that it was with his aid the creature had been easily captured in the fields, he himself had pacified it when it had wished to escape from its two-legs hunters.

The musical instruments had blared again and the arena was now empty.

But only momentarily. Advancing toward them, two barbed sticks in hand, was one

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the colorfully dressed two-legs, arrogance and confidence in his tread.

And cruel death in his face.

The crowd screamed its pleasure.

Wwiern waited for developments. Waiting to see what came next in this spectacle of pain and hate. He knew one thing, if possible he was not going to allow his host to suffer further wounds.

The beast was growing restless, wishing to charge. It pawed the ground nervously.

Huh, Toro! the two-legs called disdainfully.

Wwiern waited for the two-legs to approach closer. Suddenly it began to run toward them in a quarter-circle, barbs extended.

The symbiont allowed his host to break into a run in return and two-legs and four approached a collision point. And now Wwiern could see the other's plan. He expected to place the darts and twirl away to retreat safely to the wooden wall which surrounded the ring.

For a moment the brightly clad two-legs was up on his toes, barbs held gracefully high, and then Wwiern had tossed the sharp horn of his beast to the left, embedding one deep into the other's abdominal cavity. Even as the horn sank to its full depth he could see the look of shocked amazement which preceeded pain in the face of his enemy.

There were shouts and calls from all directions and he tossed his host's head, throwing the antagonist to one side in the movement.

The animal's instincts over which he had to hold tight rein, cried to be allowed to pursue the fallen two-legs, to gore him again and again, to trample and toss, and almost Wwiern was able to lose himself in the primitive creature's bloodlust. Almost, but not quite. Wwiern held him firm. A clear head was needed now.

The others were coming, waving their capes and attempting to rescue their comrade. Wwiern charged.

Two he gored, ignoring the flapping capes on which they depended. One he knocked down and trampled.

Four writhing figures, three of them streaming blood, marked the sand of the arena when he trotted back to its center to resume his position.

The cries from the stands had, to his surprise, changed little. The bloodlust was still there. Shockingly, the fact that the blood spilt had been that of the two-legs rather

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

than his host had not deterred them.

He realized then that the multitudes had come for that very purpose—to see their own race risked as well as to witness the death of a more lowly life form.

He had expected to allow the fallen wounded to be taken away for treatment but now the full realization of the depravity of this life form brought him to bitter action again. A thousand millennia of civilization dropped away and he became truly a part of the beast he occupied.

He thundered forward, not knowing whether or not this was possible, whether his animal host, beautiful specimen though it was, was capable of the exertion he demanded of it. It was. The wooden barrier he cleared, landing behind it in a confusion of shouting, horrified spectators.

He charged desperately, tossing and goring, tramping indiscriminately. But this was not his goal, his overpowering rage encompassed the thousands above him. He sped about the enclosure searching for a method to ascend the wall into the stands.

Here! Here it was. A stand built for an observer who has stood with some lensed device in his hands, some type of photography, Wwiern decided. The stand was all he needed.

Front feet, a mighty stretching, punishing bound and his legs were over the stone balustrade above. He scrambled mightily, using muscles for a task never remotely contemplated by his host—and then was in the packed seats.

They faced him not a moment, the shouting, screaming, terrified multitudes. He plowed through them as they turned to run, tossed and gored, trampled and killed in his fury of contempt and revenge.

When he stopped, the fury was still within him but they were gone. Through small doors, sometimes over the wall, back into the arena, they had flowed to escape him.

He stood alone except for the dead and the wounded too badly hurt to escape.

Not quite. At his feet lay stretched the blonde-haired one, the guest, he had decided, of the honored two-legs. A female of the species, undoubtedly a beauty among the race.

From the wall there was a loud report and he felt a stunning blow strike the side of his host. He glared up at the source of the sound. A two-legs stood at the wall's top, a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

smoking tube in hand. An advanced weapon throwing a projectile by chemical explosion, Wwiern realized—his host's time was limited.

He looked down again at the blonde-haired one. He had not gored nor trampled her. She was untouched but unconscious, evidently in a faint from terror. In view of the fact that she breathed still, he assumed she would recover in time.

The loud report came again, and the blow all but forced him to his knees.

Wwiern had little time. He extended the animal's snout to within inches of the fallen female. The blast came again and the animal sank to its knees in agony and even as it did, Wwiern began to leave its body. Slowly he oozed from his dying four-legged host and toward the two-legs. He knew that from the distance involved none of the other two-legs would observe. The process would take only moments.

And if they thought he had caused them damage in the four-legged host, wait until he was in control of this blonde, two-legs female. One way or the other he would show them what trouble really was!

THE END

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mr. and Mrs. Saturday Night

By ROBERT F. YOUNG

We doubt if the real television people will ever go as far as the fictional ones in this story. But if they do—Wow!

The Altar

GARY watched the telempathy tech make the final adjustments on the portable transmitter. The steel-encased machine, with its crystalline absorber hovering over it like a disembodied eye, made the room seem cramped, and Gary couldn't help wondering how the small apartment could possibly accommodate all the guests who would be coming to visit the following night, even though he knew that the guests wouldn't be there physically—that the apartment, in a telempathic sense, was large enough to accommodate the whole world.

Judy was watching the tech, too. Her hazel eyes were still wide from the shock of learning that the TE Programs Department had named her and Gary as the next "Mr. and Mrs. Saturday Night." It *was* hard to believe, Gary conceded, especially when you considered the increasing number of newly married couples daily matriculating from the adolescence academies and the corresponding increase in the eligibility list.

The tech was tall and capable, and his neat gray tech-suit emphasized both qualities. His long, aristocratic fingers played adroitly over the intricate mass of tubes and wires, adjusting here, tightening there, chording a complex melody that only he could hear.

Gary cleared his throat. "Just what will we have to do?" he asked.

"Mr. Llewelyn will be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

around to brief you this evening," the tech said.

"I know, but you must have some idea."

"Well, as nearly as I understand it, all you're supposed to do is what you'd ordinarily do on any other Saturday night. Just be yourselves. That's what it amounts to."

Judy laughed nervously. "Sounds easy enough," she said. "But think of all those people tuning in!"

"Yes, just think of them!" said Gary.

"You're not supposed to think of them." The tech inserted a long screwdriver into the bowels of the transmitter, plied it deftly. "That's why we install our equipment a day ahead of time—to give you a chance to accustom yourselves to it . . . Say, from the way you two talk, you'd think you didn't *want* to be hosts!"

"Oh, we *want* to be, all right," Judy said quickly. "We —we just haven't got used to the idea yet."

"About Paradise Isle—" Gary said, "—is it really as lovely as they say it is?"

The tech gave the screwdriver a final turn, withdrew it and slipped it into the inside pocket of his coat. He fitted the cover of the transmitter into place and locked it, then turned and regarded Gary obliquely. "You'd be surprised at the number of things they don't tell a t-tech—and Paradise Isle is number one on the list . . . Why don't you drop me a line after you get there and tell *me* whether it's lovely or not?"

"All right," Gary said. "We will."

"I'll bet you will!" The tech closed his calfskin toolbag. "You'll forget me and all the rest of the world, just like all the others. Too good for us." He picked up the toolbag and started for the door.

"Don't be bitter," Judy said. "Maybe someday *you'll* be chosen."

The tech paused in the doorway, shook his head. "Not much chance of that. My wife and I are both close to the ineligibility age. First thing you know, we'll be old enough to buy a TE set and become participants ourselves. In a way, though, I'm more glad than bitter. I've always wondered what participation would be like—and—why the participants keep it such a deep, dark secret."

"*I've* always wondered what being 'Mr. Saturday Night' would be like," Gary said.

"Or 'Mrs. Saturday Night'," said Judy.

"Looks like both of you are

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

going to find out," the tech said . . . "Happy hosting!"

The High Priests

"I don't care what you say," Penstetter said, finishing his *apéritif* and setting the empty glass down on the damask tablecloth. "I still wish I was engaged in a different profession."

Holden cut a small square of tenderloin, rare, and raised it to his mouth. He chewed reflectively. Presently: "You're too nostalgic, Ben. Next thing you know, you'll be telling me that people should raise their own children, instead of consigning them to puberty and adolescence institutions — or that wives should stay home, instead of working . . . What better, what higher, profession is there than the art of entertaining the masses? And in our case, with the government sponsoring our program, what more lucrative—or secure—profession is there?"

"How'd you like it if *you* and *your* wife were chosen?"

"My wife and I can't be chosen, any more than you and yours can. It's been a long time since any of us has seen 25. You took your chances and so did I—though perhaps we weren't aware of it at the time. But the odds have always been good, and today they're better yet. You can't deny that the lottery system is fair—though why I'm trying to convince you of all this is beyond me. You can quit any time you like."

"After a thorough brainwash. No thanks."

"Listen," Holden said, breaking his hardroll and buttering it evenly, "you're new in this business, and I'm going to tell you something. We're living in a Utopia right now, only diehards like yourself are too obtuse to realize it—or too stubborn to admit it. When was the last marital murder committed in this country? Why, you can't even remember, it was so long ago! And what happened to the overwhelming divorce rate of the mid-twentieth century? How many divorces have we had during the last hundred years? How many annulments? Hell, you can count them on the fingers of one hand!"

"You make me sick," Penstetter said.

"But not half as sick as you'd be without 'Mr. and Mrs. Saturday Night' coming your way every weekend. The trouble with you, Ben, is that you won't face a simple truth. It's an essential truth which our society evaded for cen-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

turies. It took a new medium like telempathy to snap us back to reality, and a program like 'Mr. and Mrs. Saturday Night' to supply the means. Do you know what that truth is, Ben?"

"I don't want to know."

"It lies behind every piece of fiction ever written," Holden said; "every play ever produced, every movie ever made, every telempathic drama ever telempathed. It originates in the simple fact that the average individual living in a complex society is dissatisfied both with himself and with his existence, and needs periodically to escape from the boredom of being himself and the boredom of living his humdrum life—*by becoming someone else.* If he can do so often enough, the psychoses that afflict all mechanistic civilizations will disappear.

"Neither the written nor the spoken word was strong enough to create a satisfactory illusion. Visual images helped, but they too failed, because they had to be distilled through the intellect. Identification was always spotty—till telempathy came along. During telempathic identification you don't *read* about someone else, you don't *see* someone else; you *become* someone else. And thanks to 'Mr. and Mrs. Saturday Night', once each week every married couple in the country, past the eligibility age, can go into another married couple's home, share their thoughts, see through their eyes, feel with them, suffer with them, be happy, sad, elated with them. What more can you ask of a program, Ben?"

"Mercy," Penstetter said.

Holden's knife slipped from his fingers, clattered against his plate. But he retrieved it casually, did not even raise his voice when he spoke his next words: "And mercy is precisely what we dispense, Ben. Mercy to the many. And the many are what count, in any civilization."

"The many are the mass," Penstetter said, "and the mass is a monster—an entity with an atomic pile for a god and an electrical circuit for a soul. God bless our Heinous Home . . . Let's have another drink. I've lost my appetite."

The Lambs

"Well," Mr. Llewelyn said, taking off his hat and stepping into the apartment, "how does it feel to be the new 'Mr. and Mrs. Saturday Night'?"

"We're still a little nervous," Gary said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Now there isn't a thing to be nervous about." Mr. Llewelyn was a small, sixtyish man with peaked features and faded blond hair. "All you have to do is act yourselves. What do you usually do on Saturday night?"

"Oh, we read a little sometimes," Judy said. "Make popcorn. Talk."

"Fine! Everybody'll love that. A nice homey evening by the fireside, so to speak. All of the wives will identify with you, Judy, and Gary, of course, will be host for the husbands."

"Then that's all we have to do?" Gary asked. "Read, make popcorn, and talk?"

"That's the ticket," Mr. Llewelyn said. "Just be yourselves. Act natural. Think whatever comes into your mind . . . Oh yes—" He reached into the inside pocket of his coat and withdrew a folded sheet of paper. "—this is your contract. Just sign your names where I've put the little x's." He indicated the two blank lines at the bottom of the page and handed Gary a fountain pen.

"I—I never figured on a contract," Gary said.

"Why certainly there's a contract. Who ever heard of anybody appearing on TE without signing a contract!"

"But this is for only one night. We're not really TE stars."

"As 'Mr. and Mrs. Saturday Night' you'll be the biggest TE stars in the country!" Despite his bantering tone of voice, Mr. Llewelyn betrayed symptoms of impatience. His right eyelid kept twitching every now and then, and he kept wiping his mouth — as though his words didn't taste just right. "All it says," he went on, "is that we — the owners of the program—agree to transport both of you to Paradise Isle and to maintain you in luxury for the rest of your lives, in return for your appearing for one hour on our show; and that you, Judy, and you, Gary, agree to accept your life-long vacations on Paradise Isle as full payment for your services. Fair enough?"

"I guess so." Gary signed his name and handed the contract to Judy.

"What's Paradise Isle like?" Judy asked, affixing her signature and returning the contract to Mr. Llewelyn.

"Never having been there, I'm not qualified to tell you," Mr. Llewelyn said. "But you'll find out for yourselves soon enough—right after the program, in fact. Your escort will be waiting for you just outside the door, and there'll be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a chartered jet at the airport, ready to whisk you away to the land of dreams!" He wiped his mouth. "So you'd better get all your things packed—if you haven't already—and be all set to go!"

"We're all set now," Gary said.

"Fine!" Mr. Llewelyn went over to the transmitter, checked the lock on the cover, glanced cursorily at the crystalline absorber. "Everything seems to be shipshape, so I guess I'll be getting back to the studio. Till 9:30 tomorrow night, then!"

"How—how will we know when we're on?" Judy asked.

"Oh, you'll just *know*," Mr. Llewelyn said, putting on his hat and opening the door. He wiped his mouth again, and his eyelid jitterbugged furiously. "Don't worry about *that!*"

The Entity

The Entity quivered into slow wakefulness. The million windows of its country-wide habitat turned gray, then pink, and presently the sun poured forth its brilliance over the land, and the Entity began arising from its million beds and stretching its million arms and yawning with its million mouths. It cooked and consumed its million breakfasts and departed for its million occupations. It shuffled heaved wrote typed laughed cried lifted turned talked loved hated received gave won lost ate lunch and shuffled heaved wrote typed laughed cried lifted turned talked loved hated received gave won lost and returned to its million lairs and its million frustrations and ate its million dinners of steak and roast beef and fish and shrimp and pork chops and sat down before its million TE sets to partake.

It was Saturday night.

The Sacrifice

"Feel anything yet?" Gary asked.

"Not a thing," Judy said. "Maybe we're not on yet."

"Oh, we're on all right." He glanced at his watch. "It's 9:35 . . . Say, I felt something then!"

"So did I."

"Like — like something crawling in my brain. Like—"

Judy got up from the couch. "I'll make some popcorn."

"Swell!"

He watched her walk through the archway into the kitchen, absently noting the turn of her calves, the rhythmic motion of her hips. The most natural thought in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

world crossed his mind, only somehow it didn't seem natural now, it seemed obscene. Abruptly he remembered the way older people had sometimes eyed him on the street, the way they had sometimes eyed Judy . . . like someone sizing up a chuck roast or a melon or a basket of tomatoes, and on the heels of that memory came another, older, memory, and he relived the time in puberty school when the Principal had called all the boys into the gymnasium and there had been this little doctor waiting there, looking ironically like a satyr with his iron-gray hair and his iron-gray goatee, who'd shouted sex at them for an hour, threatening them, reviling them, condemning them . . . and he had stood there, sick to his stomach, revolted by the obscene things the little goat-man was saying, resolving never again to look at another girl—

He got up from the couch, choking back the memory. He could feel the Entity in his mind, and it was like a worm crawling through his secrets, digging into his past, feeding on his frustrations and his fears, probing for perversions, for infidelities, for food of any kind . . .

Judy's face was pale when he entered the kitchen. She had emptied a can of popcorn kernels into the electric popper and they were just beginning to sputter in the melted grease. He got a bottle of beer out of the refrigerator and opened it with trembling fingers. Concentrate on what you're doing, he told himself. Concentrate on the present, concentrate on this very moment and forget there was ever any other. But it wasn't any good, and presently another memory bubbled to the surface of his consciousness, and he climbed the tree that grew between the girls' and the boys' dormitories and looked down from his leafy bower into the second floor room where the two girls were undressing, watching with fascination and with horror, all the while hearing the imprecations of the goat-man echoing in the back of his mind.

He looked at Judy again, and her face frightened him. She had forgotten to cover the popper and the popcorn was jumping out like grotesque flakes of snow and falling crazily all over the table and tumbling to the floor. She stood there like a frightened fairy princess, bereft of wand and magic . . . Abruptly he returned to the moment in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

academy gym where the inter-institution dance had taken place and he waited again, just inside the entrance, thinking of all the other get-acquainted dances he'd attended, thinking of the two extra years he'd been forced to remain in the adolescence academy because he'd refused to take a wife . . . and then seeing the girl walking towards him across the floor, the gentle dream of a girl in a pink cloud of a dress, and knowing suddenly that with her it would be different, that with her it would be all right . . . the girl, Judy, the same Judy standing beside him now, in the merciless brightness of the kitchen, in the merciless grip of the Entity—

"I feel naked, Gary. Help me, please!"

The transmitter, Gary thought. He got a hammer out of the utility closet and ran into the living room and began pounding on the crystalline absorber. But the absorber refused to shatter or fall, and finally he hurled the hammer to the floor and began tugging on the lead-in cable, trying to pull it free from its fastenings. Judy joined him, and they pulled together; but the cable wouldn't budge, and when they tried to open the door, that wouldn't budge either; and then they heard the voices in the corridor, the voices of their escort, and they realized that even if the door did open, there was no escape for them, would be no escape till the blood of their intimacy had ceased to flow, till the last drops of their private moments and their cherished secrets had oozed from their minds, and their marriage lay dead at their feet.

Suddenly Gary became aware that he was staring at the bedroom door. Judy was staring at it, too. He tried to look away, but his eyes would not obey him. They weren't his eyes any more: they were the Entity's eyes now, just as his body and soul were the Entity's; just as Judy's eyes and Judy's body and soul were the Entity's—

And Paradise Isle had nothing to do with paradise: it was a euphemism for asylum—the asylum to which you were consigned after you had shared your wife—or your husband—with the world. . . .

They ran to each other like frightened children and held each other close . . . and felt the first surge of vicarious desire within them—of lust and fear and frustration, of need and want and lechery—as the Entity closed in for the kill.

THE END

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It came upon them like a galactic tornado—swirling, swallowing, a funnel of madness, a funnel of hate, a funnel of eternity. . . .

THE FUNNEL OF GOD

By ROBERT BLOCH

ILLUSTRATED by VARGA

WHEN Harvey Wolf was seven, he met the Black Skelm.

Now "skelm" means rascal, and at his age, Harvey knew nothing of duplicity and the ways of men, so he was not afraid. Nor did the man's skin repel him, for Harvey was ignorant of *apartheid.*

The Basutos on his father's place called him *baas,* but he did not feel that he was their master. Even Jong Kurt, his father's foreman, treated the men of color without contempt. Harvey came to know the Bechuanas, the Kaffirs, the Fingos and the Swazis far better than the *Roinecks,* which was their name for Englishmen.

Harvey knew his own father was a *Roineck,* who owned this place, but that was virtually the extent of his knowledge. His father never visited him; he spent all his time at the Cape, and had ever since Harvey's mother died when he was born. Harvey had been left in care of Jong Kurt and of his wife, whom Harvey learned to call Mama.

"Poor little one," Mama said. "But you are free and happy with us, so *gued geroeg.*"

And Harvey was happy. Mama made him *veldschoen* of rawhide, and he roamed at will over the *karroo* beyond the drift where the *fontein* gushed. As he grew older, he sought the *krantz* above the valley where he made his home, and soon he was climbing the great *berg* which towered over all.

Here he found the wild or-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNREAD
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

chids of the upland plateaus, plucked as he wriggled his way through the mimosa, the thornbush and the hartekoal trees where the *aasvogel* perched and preened and peered for prey.

Harvey came to know the beasts of the mountain and the plain—the aard-wolf and the inyala, the oribi and the duiker, the springbok and the kudu. He watched the tall secretary-bird and the waddling kori bustard, and traced the flight of bats from out of the hidden caves on the *berg* above. From time to time he encountered snakes; the *cobra di capello,* the puff adder, and the dreaded mamba.

But nothing that loped or trotted or flew or crawled ever harmed him. He grew bolder and started to explore the caves high upon the faraway *berg.*

That was when Mama warned him about the Black Skelm.

"He is an evil man who eats children," Mama said. "The caves are full of their bones, for on such a diet one lives forever. You are to stay away from the *berg.*"

"But Kassie goes to the *berg* at night," Harvey protested. "And Jorl, and Swarte."

"They are black and ignorant," Mama told him. "They seek the Black Skelm for charms and potions. The wicked old man should be in prison. I have told Jong Kurt time and again to take the dogs to the *berg* and hunt him out. But he is too slim, that one, to be easily captured. They say he sleeps in the caves with the bats, who warn him when strangers approach."

"I would like to see such a man," Harvey decided.

"You are to stay away from the *berg,* mind?"

And Mama shook him, and he promised, but Harvey did not mind.

One hot morning he toiled across the *karroo,* slipping out unobserved from the deserted, heat-baked house, and made his way painfully up the *krantz.* The *aasvogels* drooped limply in the trees, their eyes lidded, for nothing moved in the plain below. Even the orchids were wilting.

It was no cooler on the *krantz,* and when Harvey found the winding *pad* which circled the *berg,* he paused, parched and faint, and considered turning back. But the trip would be long, and perhaps he could find a *fontein* up here. There were *pads* he had not yet explored—

He started off at random,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and thus it was that he came to the cave of the Black Skelm.

The Black Skelm was a gnarled little monkey-man with a white scraggle of beard wisping from his sunken cheeks. He sat at the mouth of the cave, naked and crosslegged, staring out at the *veldt* below with immobile eyes.

Harvey recognized him at once and put his knuckles to his mouth. He started to edge back, hoping that the old man hadn't observed him, but suddenly the scrawny neck corded and swivelled.

"Greetings, *baas*."

The voice was thin and piping, yet oddly penetrating. It gained resonance from an echo in the cave behind.

"G-greetings," Harvey murmured. He continued to edge away.

"You fear me, boy?"

"You are the Black Skelm. You—"

"Eat children?" The old man cackled abruptly. "Yes, I know the tale. It is nonsense, meant only to deceive fools. But you are not a fool, Harvey Wolf."

"You know my name?"

"Of course. An old man learns many things."

"Then you've come down to the plains?"

"Not for long years. But the bats bear tidings. They are my brothers of the nights, just as the *aasvogels* are my brothers by day." The Black Skelm smiled and gestured. "Sit down. I would invite you inside the cave, but my brothers are sleeping now."

Harvey hesitated, eyeing the little old man. But the man *was* little, and so very old; Harvey couldn't imagine him to be dangerous. He sat down at a discreet distance.

"The bats told you my name?" he ventured.

The wrinkled black man shrugged. "I have learned much of you. I know you seek the *berg* because it is your wish to see what is on the other side."

"But I've never told anyone that."

"It is not necessary. I look into your heart, Harvey Wolf, and it is the heart of a seeker. You think to gaze upon the lands beyond this mountain; to see the *olifant*, the *kameel*, the great black brothers of the rhenoster birds. But to no purpose, my son. The elephant, the giraffe, the rhinoceros are long gone. They have vanished, with my own people."

"Your people?"

"Those you call the Zulus." The old man sighed. "Once,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

when I was a *jong*, the plains beyond the *berg* were black with game. And beyond the plains the *leegtes* were black with the *kraals* of my people. This was our world."

And the Black Skelm told Harvey about his world; the Zulu empire that existed long before the coming of the *Roinecks* and the Boers. He spoke of Chaka and the other great *indunas* who commanded armies in royal splendor, wearing the leopardskin *kaross* and lifting the knobkerrie of kingly authority to command the *impis*—the regiments of grotesquely painted warriors in kilts of wildcat tails. They would parade by torchlight, the ostrich plumes bobbing like the wild sea, and their voices rose more loudly than the wind in the cry of *"Bayete!"* which was the regal salute. And in return the *induna* chanted but a single response. *"Kill!"* Casting his spear to the north, the south, the east, or the west, he sent the regiments forth. And the *impis* killed. They conquered, or never returned. That was the way of it, in the old days.

Until, finally, none were left to return.

None but the Black Skelm, who sought the caves of the bats and the vultures, to live like a scavenger in a world of death.

"But my people are down there," Harvey protested. "They are not dead. They tell me Cape Town is a great city, and beyond that—"

"Cape Town is a cesspool of civilization," said the Black Skelm. "And beyond that are greater sewers in which men struggle and claw at one another, even as they drown. It is a sickening spectacle, this. The world will soon end, and I would that I could die with it. But, of course, I shall never die."

Harvey's head hurt; the sun was very hot. He wondered if he had heard aright.

"You can't die?"

"It is true, *baas*. Soon, of course, I must decide upon my next move, for this body of mine is no longer suitable. But—"

Harvey rose, reeling a bit, and backed away.

"Don't eat me!" he cried.

The old man cackled again. "Nonsense!" he said. "Sheer, superstitious nonsense. I do not eat children. My brothers feed me." He stretched forth his hand. "Look!"

And the air was filled with the odor of carrion, as the *aasvogels* gathered, fluttering frantically up the face of the sheer cliff and clustering

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

about the bony body of the wizened black. In their beaks they carried bits of rancid flesh, dropping their tribute into the Black Skelm's fingers.

Then Harvey knew that he was very sick indeed; the sun had played tricks. He ran into the cave, and it was dark and musty, and from the twisted caverns beyond welled a terrible odor of decay. The bats hung head downwards, hung in mute millions, and the floor of the cave was not covered with bones but with whitish droppings. On the walls great eyes winked—eyes that had been painted by hands long dead. The eyes whirled and Harvey felt his kneecaps turn to water. He would have fallen, but the Black Skelm came up behind him and caught him.

The old man's grip was surprisingly strong.

"Do not fear," he whispered. "Drink this." And he held out the hollowed skull. The liquid was warm and red.

"Blood," Harvey quavered.

"Of cattle. It is pure and fresh."

"But you are a wizard—"

"What is a wizard? Merely a seeker, like yourself. A seeker who has perhaps peered further than the land beyond the mountain."

The Black Skelm led him back to the mouth of the cave, and bade him sit in the shadows there. Harvey was suddenly very tired. He closed his eyes, scarcely listening, as the Black Skelm droned on.

"All men are seekers, but each chooses a different path in his search for understanding. There is the path of Columbus who sought to encompass the earth and the path of Galileo who sought to search the heavens; the sevenfold path of Buddha which led, he hoped, to Nirvana, and the path of Appolonius which is an inward spiral with oblivion at its core. There is Einstein and—"

Harvey opened his eyes. He was, he knew, quite delirious. The black man sitting beside him, chanting strange names, eating out of the beaks of vultures, talking of Zulu *kraals* which had vanished a hundred years ago—this was a fever-dream. He could hear only bits and snatches.

"You will be a seeker, too, Harvey Wolf. You will go out into the world to look for knowledge. Eventually you will sicken of knowledge and try to find truth. Perhaps we can discover it together—"

Harvey's head throbbed. The sun was blazing off in the west, sinking beneath the pur-

LICENSED TO UIC FOR
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ple lower lid of a gigantic cloud. And a voice was echoing along the *berg*, calling, "Harvey — Harvey, where are you?"

"Jong Kurt!" Harvey rose.

The Black Skelm was already on his feet, scuttling into the shadows of the cave.

"No, wait—come back!" Harvey called, groping after the old man and nearly falling as his fevered body convulsed in a sudden chill.

But the old man retreated into the cave.

And then Jong Kurt was looming on the pathway, his face grave and his forehead seamed with apprehension. He caught the reeling boy in his arms.

Suddenly the blackness blossomed and burst forth from the cave, a blinding billowing of squeaking, stenchful shadows—shadows that flapped and fluttered and stared with millions of little red eyes.

Jong Kurt fled down the mountain, carrying Harvey Wolf. But the eyes followed, haunting Harvey's delirium in dreams. . . .

They sent him away, then. Harvey wasn't conscious when the decision was made, though he did see his father once, afterwards, at the dock in Cape Town. His father introduced him to his Uncle Frank, from America, and gave him strict orders about minding his manners and following instructions. There was talk about a New Life and a Good School and the Unhealthy Outlook that comes from being alone.

Harvey tried to tell his father about the Black Skelm, but his father wouldn't listen; not even Mama or Jong Kurt had listened. They all said Harvey had suffered from sunstroke, and in the end he came to believe it himself. It had all been heat and hallucination and nothing was real now but the great ocean and the great city.

In New York his Uncle Frank and his Aunt Lorraine were very kind. They took vicarious pleasure in his amazement at the sight of the city, and conducted him to his first motion picture.

That seemed to be a mistake, and after they dragged the frightened, hysterical child out of the theater he suffered what the doctor called a "relapse." Afterwards, he forgot the whole incident, and it wasn't until years later—

But meanwhile, Harvey grew up. He went to school and he managed to endure the tight, idiotic abominations called "Health Shoes." Grad-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ually he accumulated the fund of knowledge necessary for a child to flourish in our society —that is to say, he could identify the various makes and models of automobiles in the streets, he learned the names of "baseball stars," and the meanings behind the four-letter words and the slang-phrases of the day.

Also, he learned to insulate his interior existence from other eyes; he found that seekers are not popular with their fellows, so he concealed his interests from his playmates. His teachers, however, were not unaware of his intelligence; at their advice he went on to private schools and from there to an Ivy League college.

He was still there when Uncle Frank and Aunt Lorraine went over to Cape Town to bring his father back for a reunion; he was there when the news came to him that the private plane had crashed on the return flight.

After the funeral he visited the attorneys.

They told him he had inherited the entire estate. Once liquidated, with all taxes paid, he could count on an accumulation of better than three million dollars. It would be ready for him by the time he reached his twenty-first birthday.

Right then and there he made a sensible decision; he decided it was time to retire.

It was not just the caprice of a spoiled brat or a rich man's heir. At twenty-one, Harvey Wolf was a fairly presentable young man—many girls even found him handsome, for three million reasons—and he possessed an alert intellect.

He turned his back on the world only because he was fed up with hypocrisy and liars.

Harvey's first move was to leave the college. He said farewell forever to its small Humanities Department and its huge football stadium.

Next, he departed from a church whose spiritual representatives appeared at launching ceremonies to bless aircraft carriers and destroyers.

At the same time he walked out on most of the phenomena and beliefs held dear by his peers; on chauvinism, on racial prejudice, on the feudal caste-system glorified by the armed forces of our democracy.

He briefly considered going into business, until he found he couldn't subscribe to the widespread doctrine that there is some mystically ennobling value attached to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"competition" and that somehow everybody benefits under a system where one man is dedicated to outsmarting another.

Harvey turned his back on the life of a wealthy idler because he could not tolerate the common amusements. He did not believe that animal-killers were "sportsmen," whether they dressed in red coats and drank champagne before chasing a fox or wore dirty dungarees and guzzled beer out of the bottle before shooting at an unsuspecting duck. He did not think that baseball players or boxers or even bullfighters were as much heroic as they were overpaid. He squinted but saw nothing in abstract art; he listened, but heard nothing in its credos and critiques.

Harvey Wolf turned his back on Mother's Day, Valentine's Day, Christmas, and all the other holidays heralded by the joyous tinkle of cash-registers on high. He deplored the phoney virility of the men's magazines, the fake coyness of the women's magazines, and the artificial social values which emotionally warped young people into "manliness" or "femininity."

Taking stock of himself, Harvey found he did not worship sportscars or subscribe to the "theory of obsolescence" dearly beloved by manufacturers and dearly paid for by consumers. He abhorred drum-majorettes, bathing beauty contests, and the publicity given "Miss Canned Goods" or the "Oklahoma Cucumber Queen." He took a dim, pained view of billboards, and disliked the transformation of natural parks and beauty spots into commercialized locales for hot-dog stands and souvenir concessions which sold little wooden outhouses.

He held opinions which would automatically antagonize all fraternity-members, morticians, professional evangelists, Texans, and the marchers in St. Patrick's Day parades. He did not believe in *caveat emptor;* card players who slam each trick down on the table and bellow at the top of their lungs; fake "frontier days" held by rough, tough pioneer-towns in the wilds of New Jersey; sound engineers who "ride the gain" on TV commercials; professional fund-raisers who take 40% off the top in charity drives, or people who take pride in announcing that they are "quick-tempered," as though this statement entitled them to special privileges.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Harvey held a bias against practical jokers, and people who obscure driving visibility by decorating their car-windows with dangling dolls, oversize dice, baby shoes, and imitation shrunken heads. He saw no sense to endurance-contests, had no patience with litter-bugs, failed to believe in Beggar's Night or politicians who "compromise" after election at the expense of repudiating their campaign pledges. He had a contempt for Muscle Beach exhibitionists and he objected to the rewriting of history under the guise of "patriotism." He—but the list is endless, and of interest only to psychiatrists; *they* get $50 an hour for listening.

Harvey Wolf didn't go to the psychiatrists—not yet, at any rate, including the $50 an hour one.

He thought he was searching for something to believe in and that perhaps he could find it in good, hard, scientific logic.

So he sailed for Europe, to study at the source.

In Edinburgh, Harvey encountered a Brilliant Doctor who prided himself on complete objectivity.

"Nothing," said the Brilliant Doctor, in one of his famed private seminars, "is ever finally 'proved' and everything remains possible in theory.

"For example, granted the loose molecular structure of both a human body and a brick wall, it is only logical to concede that, with the exact proper alignment of every single molecule in the given body with every single molecule in the given wall, at a given instant it would be possible for said body to walk through said wall and emerge unscathed on the other side.

"The chances are almost inconceivably infinitesimal, but the *possibility* must be granted."

Harvey Wolf thereupon asked the Brilliant Doctor, in the light of this opinion, what he thought of allied phenomena. What of his late countryman, the Scottish medium, D. D. Home, who practiced levitation? He rose, resting on his back in mid-air, then floated out of one second-storey window and back into the room through another, in full view and broad daylight.

"Nonsense!" said the Brilliant Doctor.

Harvey Wolf blinked. "But no less an observer than the distinguished scientist, Sir William Crookes, testified he had witnessed this feat with his own eyes," Harvey replied.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Impossible!" said the Brilliant Doctor. . . .

At Oxford, Harvey Wolf was enthralled by a Learned Scholar who spoke of the biological basis of Life and the almost metaphysical borderland between Being and Nothingness.

"The electromagnetic principles governing sentience and consciousness are still indefinable," he announced. "No man has yet isolated the Life Force or truly defined death or nonexistence except in terms of its absence."

Harvey Wolf was interested. What, he asked, did the Learned Scholar think of Pierre and Eve Curie's signed testimony that they had seen genuine evidence of psychic phenomena demonstrated by a medium? What about Thomas Edison's similar convictions, and his final experiments in communication with the spirit world?

"There is no objective validity offered in evidence here," said the Learned Scholar.

"But we ignored electricity for thousands of years," Harvey protested. "Its omnipresent existence was unknown to us except in lightning until we found a means of harnessing this force. Surely, if the borderline between existence and non-existence, consciousness and unconsciousness, cannot be exactly defined, and yet is apparently subject to certain definite principles—

"Utter rot!" said the Learned Scholar. . . .

In Heidelberg, Harvey Wolf studied under a famous Herr Doktor-Professor whose technical mastery of neuropathology was exceeded only by his interest in psychosomatic medicine. The Herr Doktor-Professor was extremely liberal in his outlook, and even admitted prodromosis as a basis for diagnosis.

"I knew a surgeon who was in charge of an army hospital during the war," Harvey said. "One of his patients was completely paralyzed from the waist down—the spinal cord had been entirely severed and there was no nervous response. He lay in bed, wasting away, and was informed he'd never move his legs again. He refused to accept the verdict. Each day he pulled himself up in bed, lifted his legs over the side, tried to stand. The surgeon gave strict orders to restrain him, but he persisted. After two gruelling months, he stood. A month later he took his first step. All tests showed it was physically im-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

possible for him to exercise any control over his legs, but he walked—"

"Impossible!" muttered the Herr Doktor-Professor.

"Yet what about Edgar Cayce and his clinically-verified healings of organic disorders with no possible basis in hysteria? What about—"

"Dumkopf!" opined the Herr-Doktor Professor. . . .

In the Sorbonne faculty, Harvey met a Celebrated Savant with unorthodox views; a man who dared to side with Charles Fort in his questioning of organized science. He once stated that if we accepted the theory of evolution from a non-anthropomorphic viewpoint, it was quite possible to believe that man's function on earth was merely to act as host for cancer cells which would eventually learn to survive the death of the human body and emerge as the next, higher life-form. He was even fond of quoting Mark Twain and others to the effect that the stars and planets of our universe might be merely the equivalent of tiny corpuscles moving through the blood-stream of some incalculably huge monster. And that this monster, in turn, might walk the surface of another world in another universe which in turn might be composed of similar corpuscles—*ad infinitum* to the nth_2 power.

"It is a humbling thought," the Celebrated Savant observed, and Harvey Wolf agreed.

"A far remove from petty human concepts," Harvey mused. "There is no need to concern oneself with trivia in the face of it now, is there?"

But the Celebrated Savant wasn't listening; he was reading the newspaper and scowling.

"Those pigs of Algerians!" he muttered to himself. "Yes, and those lousy *colons*, bidding for power and setting up education for all. It is a disaster!"

Harvey shrugged. "The world is only a corpuscle," he said. "Or perhaps it's just a virus-cell in the bloodstream of the Infinite. What does it matter?"

"Cochon! The purity of the State depends upon maintaining our autonomy. And furthermore, young man—"

Harvey Wolf found himself walking out once more. But this time he was walking out into Paris.

Paris, of course, is what you make it. To cutpurse Villon, living from hand to mouth and from the *Small* to the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Grand Testament, it was a city of cold cobblestones where every twisted alley led only to the inevitable gibbet. To Bonaparte it was the site of a triumphal arch through which he marched to celebrate victory—or furtively avoided, in a solitary coach, as he whipped his horses from the field of Moscow or Waterloo. Toulouse-Latrec clattered across Paris leaning upon two sticks, and his city was a gaslight inferno. There is the *Sec* and *Brut* Paris of poutlipped Chevalier, the cerebral city of Proust and Gide and Sartre, the Paris of the GI on leave for *couchez-vous* carnival. There is the Paris of the tourist—the Louvre's legweary legacy, the giddy gaping from the Eiffel Tower, the hasty concealment of the paperbound *Tropic of Cancer* at the bottom of the suitcase. There is a Paris as gay as Colette, as tough as Louis-Ferdinand Celine, as weird as Huysmans. You pay your money and you take your choice.

And when you have three million dollars—

Harvey Wolf brooded about it in a Montmartre *bistro*. A bearded man stared at him with yellow cat-eyes and said, "Welcome, Pontius Pilate."

"Pilate?" echoed Harvey Wolf.

"I recognize the mood," said the bearded man. "You are asking yourself Pilate's age-old question—*what is Truth?*"

"And the answer?"

"Truth is sensation," the bearded man told him. "Sensation alone is reality. All else is illusion."

"Hedonism, eh? I don't know—"

"You can learn. Experience is the great teacher."

Harvey was sated with civilization, sick of science. He spent six months with the bearded man and the bearded man's friends. He rented a villa near Antibes, and many guests came.

There was the dwarf girl and the giantess and the woman with the filed and pointed teeth; the lady who slept only in a coffin and never alone; the girl whose luggage consisted solely of a custom-made traveling case filled entirely with whips. There was a rather unusual troupe of artists whose specialty consisted of a pantomime dramatization of the *Kama Sutra*.

Long before the six months were up, Harvey realized that his meeting with the bearded man had not been accidental. Behind the beard was neither Jesus, D. H. Lawrence or even a genuine Gilles de Rais—merely a weak-chinned, loose-

CENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lipped voluptuary adventurer who had visions of sugarplum splendor in the form of a billion-*franc* blackmail scheme.

Harvey got rid of him, at last, for considerably less, and he did not begrudge the price he finally paid. For he had learned that the senses are shallow and the orgasmic is not the ultimate peak of perceptivity.

Harvey went to Italy and immersed himself in Renaissance art. He journeyed to Spain and somehow he found he'd started to drink. A girl he met introduced him to some little capsules her friends smuggled in from Portugal. At the end of another six months he was picked up in the streets of Seville and shipped back home through the kindly offices of the American consulate.

They put him in Bellevue and then in a private san upstate. Harvey kicked the habit and emerged after a loss of four months and forty pounds.

He ended up, as do most seekers after Truth, on the confessional couch of a private psychiatrist.

The psychiatrist decided that perhaps Walt Disney was to blame for it all.

Harvey admitted the man had an interesting argument. He was able, after many sessions, to recall his first visit to the movies when he'd come to America. Uncle Frank and Aunt Lorraine had taken him to see what was perhaps the most famous short cartoon of the Depression era—*The Three Little Pigs.*

He could recreate quite vividly, without the aid of narcohypnosis, the strong fear-reaction engendered by the sight of the Big Bad Wolf stalking the helpless pigs. He remembered how the Wolf huffed and puffed and blew the straw house in. What happened immediately thereafter he did not know, because it was then that he had been carried, screaming, from the theater.

It was, the psychiatrist averred, a "traumatic incident." And now, as an adult, Harvey had read a great deal about animated cartoons and their possible effect on children. Following the success of *The Three Little Pigs* it seemed as if the entire concept of cartoon-making underwent a drastic change. In place of playful Pluto and droll Donald Duck came a horde of ferocious bulldogs, gigantic cats with slavering fangs; huge animal menaces who tormented smaller creatures and sought to devour them in their great red maws.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But, if anything, their little intended victims were worse; they always outwitted the hulking pursuers and seemed to take fiendish delight in sadistic revenge. One animal was always crushing another under a truck or a steamroller; pushing his enemy off a steep cliff, blasting his head open with a shotgun, blowing him up with dynamite, dragging his body across the teeth of a great circular saw. During the years, the so-called "kiddy matinee" became a horror-show, a *Grand Guignol* of the animal kingdom in which atrocious crimes and still more atrocious punishments flashed in fantastic fashion across the screen in lurid color, to the accompaniment of startlingly realistic shrieks, groans, screams of agony, and cruel laughter.

Parents who carefully and conscientiously shielded their supposedly innocent youngsters from the psychological pitfalls of the dreaded comic-books were quite content to listen to the same moppets shriek uncontrollably at the sight of a twenty-foot high animated hyena being burned to death while the happy little rabbit squealed in ecstatic glee.

Harvey had read about this and he listened when the psychiatrist told him there was probably no harm in such fantasies—to the average child it was merely a vicarious outlet for aggression. Such a child unconsciously identified with the small animal who destroyed the larger tormenter; the bigger creature symbolized Daddy or Mama or some authority-figure, and it was satisfying to witness their defeat. The weapons employed were direct concepts and representations of adult civilization and its artifacts. Most children were exposed to such films from infancy on and grew up without psychic damage. As normal adult human beings they were able to go out into the world and fight its battles. Indeed, it was the avowed purpose of many psychiatrists to keep them "mentally fit" during real battles, so that they could continue to spray liquid fire from flame-throwers upon enemy soldiers cowering in tanks, or drop bombs on unseen thousands of women and children.

It was merely unfortunate, said the psychiatrist (at $50 an hour) that Harvey had been brought up away from the influences of normal society and abruptly exposed to the symbolism of the cartoon.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And there were, of course, other factors.

The fact that Harvey's last name happened to be Wolf—so that his little American playmates insisted on calling him "The Big Bad Wolf" when they innocently ganged up on him at recess and tried to emulate the punishments inflicted by the heroic little pigs in the film.

The fact that Harvey, instead of acting any normal, redblooded American boy and fighting back against the six or eight older bullies who came after him with planks and stones, chose to cry and bleed instead.

The fact that Harvey soon underwent another traumatic cinematic experience when he saw a picture called *The Wolf Man* and its sequels, and gradually came to accept and identify with the role symbolized by his last name.

The fact that Harvey seemed to have totally misinterpreted the message; to him it wasn't important that the Wolf was destroyed, but that he was revived again in the sequels.

Regrettably, said the psychiatrist (at great and expensive length) he seemed to have equated acceptance of his Wolf role with survival. As an adult, he had become a Lone Wolf, moving away from the pack. And his self-styled search for Truth was merely a search for the Father-Image, denied him in childhood.

Harvey attempted, at one point in his analysis, to talk about the Black Skelm and that fantastic fever-dream atop the *berg*. The psychiatrist listened, made notes, nodded gravely, inquired into the duration of his subsequent illness, and went back to his theory about the traumatic effect of the films. What had Harvey thought when the Wolf Man was beaten to death with a cane by his father in the movie? Did Claude Rains, as the father, remind Harvey of his own parent? Did he perceive the phallic symbolism of the silver cane used as an instrument of punishment? And so on, blah, blah, blah—until Harvey Wolf got up from the couch and walked out again.

Psychotherapy had its own truths, but its methodology was still magic. One had to believe in certain *formulae*, in spells and incantations designed to cast out demons. At the same time there was this pitiful insistence upon a "realistic" interpretation; an attempt to reconcile frankly magical

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

methodology with the so-called "normal" world.

Perhaps it was silly to compromise. The therapy-sessions had caused Harvey to think about the Black Skelm once more, for the first time in twenty years. He remembered how the little shriveled savage had spoken of Einstein, and of Appolonius of Tyana. He had sat all alone in a bat-cave atop a mountain, drinking warm blood from a skull, but he *knew*. He had a surety which science and philosophy and art only adumbrated, and the source of his knowledge must be magical insight.

Harvey moved down into the Village and began to fill his ramshackle apartment with books on occultism and theosophy. He avoided the local Beat types, but inevitably the word leaked out. The crackpots came to call, and eventually he met a girl named Gilda who claimed to be one of the innumerable illegitimate offspring of the late Aleister Crowley.

Soon he found himself standing in a darkened room, facing the East, with a steel dagger in his right hand. He touched his forehead saying, in the Hebrew tongue, *Ateh;* touched his breast and murmured *Malkuth;* touched his right shoulder as he intoned *Ve-Geburah* and his left as he muttered *Ve-Gedullah.* Clasping his hands upon the breast, with dagger pointed upwards, he shouted *Le-Olahm, Aum.*

Nothing happened.

Gilda's further experiments in sex-magic were equally (and fortunately) nonproductive. She attempted to interest him in a Black Mass, but before details could be arranged she ran off with a young man who yapped obscene ballads in public places but was granted the protection the law affords a folk-singer.

Harvey Wolf decided that he would continue his search alone.

During the year that followed he made many contacts and experiments. Undoubtedly he met with followers of Gerald Heard and Aldous Huxley. Quite certainly he investigated the effects of lysergic acid and peyote.

Both produced the same trance phenomena. Harvey found himself regressing, the film of his life running backwards, until he reached the point where he was enveloped in the billowing black batcloud from the *berg*. The little red eyes swirled fire-fly fashion all around him, then vanished into a greater dark-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ness. He stood alone on the mountain.

Yet not quite alone, because the Black Skelm was there, pointing to the path and whispering, "I have waited long, *baas*. The time has come when we must journey together."

The message was manifest; Harvey Wolf knew he would go back to Africa.

Another Wolfe had said *You Can't Go Home Again*, and in his more objective moments Harvey knew this was right. Twenty years had passed and nothing was left of the Africa he'd known. The world kept changing.

There were new governments with new slogans, new reasons to hate their neighbors, and new weapons poised to punish them. A new spurt of population, subject to new mutations of disease, sought new areas of conquest. Missiles had reached the moon and Man would follow, then go on to the stars with his civilized cargo of bombs, chewing-gum, carbon monoxide and laxatives. Eventually the millenium would come; a Soviet Federated Socialist Republic of the Solar System or a United Interplanetary States. If the former prevailed, Saturn would be set up as the new Siberia; if democracy triumphed, special facilities for certain groups would be set up on Pluto—separate, but equal, of course.

Harvey Wolf made one last effort to escape such cynical considerations and their consequences. He became an ascetic; a disciple of Raja, Brahma and Hatha Yoga. He took a cabin in the Arizona desert and here he meditated, fasted, and grew faint.

And the Black Skelm came into his dreams and chanted; "This is not the path. Come to me. I have found the way."

So, in the end, Harvey returned to the dark womb—to the Africa of his birth.

He found a new spirit at the Cape; *apartheid* had arisen, sanctioned by the sanctimonious and condoned by the cartel of dedicated men whose mission it was to artificially inflate the price of diamonds with which the wealthy bedeck their wives and their whores.

At first they would not even give Harvey permission to journey upcountry, but his father's name—and a distribution of his father's money—helped.

This time Harvey made the trip in a chartered plane, which set him down on the flat *veldt* near the old place and (in accordance with orders) left him there.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The old place had changed, of course. Kassie, Jorl, Swarte and others were gone, and no herds of humpbacked cattle roamed over the plain. The great house was deserted, or almost so; Harvey prowled the ruins for ten minutes before the elderly man with the rifle ventured forth from an outbuilding and leveled ihs weapon at him in silent menace.

"Jong Kurt!" Harvey cried. And the old man blinked, not recognizing him at first—just as Harvey didn't recognize a Kurt whom the years had robbed of any right to retain his nickname.

Kurt lowered his rifle and wept. He wept for the passing of the old place, for the death of Mama, for the changes which had come to both of them. Did the *baas* remember the way it had been? Did he remember the night Kurt had carried him, faint with delirium, down the mountainside?

"Yes, I remember," Harvey murmured. "I remember it very well."

"When you left, your father sold the cattle. The boys went into the mines, everybody left. Only Mama and I stayed on, alone. Now she is gone, too." Kurt knuckled his eyes.

"And the Black Skelm?" Harvey said. "What happened to him?"

"He is dead," Kurt answered, shaking his head solemnly.

"Dead?" Harvey stiffened in the suddenness of the thought. "Do you mean that you—"

Kurt nodded. "Your father gave orders. The day after you went to the Cape, I took the dogs up to the *berg*. I meant to hunt him down, the *verdamte* scoundrel."

"You found him there?"

The old man shrugged. "Only the bones. Picked clean, they were, on the side of the ledge near the mouth of the cave. The carrion had fed his vultures for the last time."

Kurst wheezed and slapped his thigh, and he did not see the pain in Harvey's eyes.

"But why do we stand here, *baas?* You will stay the night with me, eh? Your plane does not return before tomorrow?"

Harvey murmured an acceptance of the invitation. It was true, his plane would not return until the next day. He'd thought to spend the interval in ascending the *berg*, but there was no need now. The Black Skelm was dead.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

You Can't Go Home Again.

Kurt had comfortable quarters in one of the smaller outbuildings. Game was scarce, but there was eland steak for dinner. The old man had learned to brew beer in the traditional Kaffir fashion, and after the meal he sat reminiscing with the young *baas* and drinking toasts to the past. Finally he succumbed to stuporous slumber.

Harvey stretched out on a bunk and tried to sleep. Eventually he succeeded. Then the bat came.

It flew in through the open window and nuzzled at his chest, brushing its leathery wings against his face and nuzzling him with tiny teeth that grazed but did not bite. It chittered faintly.

Harvey awoke to a moment of horror; horror which subsided when the bat withdrew to a corner of the room. Kurt snored on, stentoriously, and Harvey sat up, brushing at the black, winged creature in an effort to drive it back out through the window.

The bat wheeled about his head, squeaking furiously. Harvey rose, flailing his arms. He opened the door. The bat hung in the doorway. Harvey beat at it. It whirled just out of arm's reach. Then it hung suspended in midair and waited.

Harvey advanced. He stood gazing across the moonlit emptiness of the *veldt*—a lake of shimmering silver beyond which towered the black hulk of the *berg*.

The bat cheeped and flapped its wings before him. Suddenly Harvey conceived the odd notion that the wings were *beckoning*. The bat wanted him to *follow*.

Then he knew. The Black Skelm wasn't dead. He was waiting for Harvey, there on the mountain. He had sent a messenger, a guide.

Harvey didn't hesitate. He went out into the moonlit plain and it was like the first time. Now he was a grown man in boots instead of a child in rawhide *veldschoen*, and it was night instead of day, but nothing had changed. Even the odd delirium rose to envelop him once again; not the fever born of the hot sun but the chill of the cold moon. He trudged across the silver silence of the sand and the bat swooped in sinister silhouette before him. When Harvey reached the *krantz* he almost decided to turn back; this was no mysterious midnight mission, only the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tipsy *fugue* of an over-imaginative man unused to the potency of Kaffir beer.

But they were waiting for him there in the shadows; huddled in teeming thousands, their tiny red eyes winking a greeting. And now thy rose all about him, covering him in a living cloak. He glanced back and found they had closed in solidly, forming a living barrier against retreat. The acrid stench was in itself a wall through which he dared not pass, so he went forward, up to the winding *pad* which took him, toiling, to the top of the *berg*.

He saw the mouth of the cave looming before him, and then all vision faded as the moon was blotted out by a cloud—a cloud of wavering wings. The bats flew off and he stood alone on the mountain-top.

The Black Skelm came out of the cave.

"You *are* alive," whispered Harvey. "I knew it. But Kurt spoke of finding bones—"

"I placed them there for that purpose." The Black Skelm wove his wrinkles into a smile. "I did not wish to be disturbed until you returned. I have waited a long time, *baas*."

"Why didn't you summon me sooner?"

"There were things you had to learn for yourself. Now you are ready, having seen the world. Is it not as I described?"

"Yes." Harvey nodded at the gnarled little black man. "But how could you know these things? I mean—"

He hesitated, but the Black Skelm grinned. "You mean I am an ignorant old savage, a witch-doctor who believes in animism and amulets." He scratched his grisly chest. "Whereas you are a man of worldly wisdom. Tell me—what is Jack Paar *really* like?"

Harvey blinked, and the old man chuckled. "You are so naive in your sophistication! *Baas*, I have seen far more than you in your brief lifetime. Although my base body sat and shriveled in this cave, my spirit ventured afar. I have been with you throughout your wanderings. I was in the theatre when you screamed; I sat with you in seminars; I felt the caress of the woman with her silver-tipped whips; I was one with you when you raised the dagger to invoke the All-Being. There are ways of transcending space and time."

"But that's impossible!" Harvey muttered. "I can't think—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Don't try to think." The Black Skelm rose, slowly and stiffly. "One does not learn through processes of organized logic, for the world is not a logical place. Indeed, it is not a place at all—merely an abstract point in infinity. True knowledge is intuitional; an impressionary process which might be labelled as heuristics."

Harvey shook his head. "You drink cattle-blood and summon bats, and you speak of heuristics—unbelievable."

"Yet you believe."

"I believe. But I don't understand. You have these powers. Why live like an animal in a cave when you might have gone forth to rule the world?"

"The world?" The old man put his hand on Harvey's shoulder; the weight was as slight as a sere and blackened leaf. "Look down there."

Together they stared at the silvery *veldt*.

"The world is a plain," said the Black Skelm. "And beyond, as we know, are the cities of the plain. Do you remember what happened to those cities? *Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven, and he overthrew those cities and all the valley and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.* Remember?"

"Yes. You're trying to tell me that the world will soon come to an end."

"Can you doubt it, after what you've seen?"

"No."

"The Lord remembered Abraham and brought him to the safety of the hills." The black man smiled, but Harvey stared at him.

"Is that why you sent for me? Because you're—"

"God?" The black man shook his head. "Not yet. I have not chosen. That is why I waited for you. Perhaps you can help me choose."

"I don't understand—"

"Every man is God, or contains within him the seed of godhead. Look." The Black Skelm fumbled with a little leather pouch at his waist and drew forth a dark, shrivelled object.

"This is a nut, encased in an outer shell. Within is the seed, the kernel. The hard shell is our human consciousness. Once broken, the kernel can be reached, the seed liberated to sprout and grow, to spread through space and thrust beyond the stars."

The Black Skelm twirled the spheroid in his wrinkled

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

palm. "Shall we open the shell and partake?" he murmured. "No, it isn't like peyote, or your lysergic acid, either. I spent years searching for the seed, which indeed comes from the Tree of Knowledge. Once eaten, it will do more than merely expand and extend consciousness. Consciousness will be discarded, like the empty husk it is, and the soul will flourish. Flourish and soar beyond all being."

He cracked the shell and dug within.

"Here, will you share with me?"

"But—why?"

The Black Skelm sighed. "Because the human part of me is old, and afraid. It may be that I will not enjoy being God. It must, I think, be a lonely estate. When you came to me as a child I recognized a fellow-seeker, and I knew that I would wait for you to join me on the quest."

Harvey stared. "This isn't just part of some crazy dream?"

"It's all a crazy dream, you know that," said the Black Skelm, softly.

"And if it works—suppose I want to turn back?"

"There is no turning back, as you have learned. One can only go forward, through the mist called life and into the mist called death. Or one who dares can go beyond. It is your choice."

"But why now?"

"Why not? Does life, as you have seen it, appeal to you?"

"No."

"Do you look forward to death?"

"No."

"Then let us move on."

The Black Skelm carefully broke the dried kernel in half and extended a portion to Harvey.

"Place it on your tongue," he said. "Then swallow slowly."

Harvey knew now that he was dreaming. He knew he was back in the bunk at Kurt's place, and there was nothing to fear—in a moment he'd awake. Meanwhile there was no harm in putting the insignificant morsel on his tongue, no harm in gripping the black man's shrivelled hand as the waves of sensation coursed through him.

Because he was back at Kurt's place now, and as he swallowed *that* too was a dream and he was back in America in Arizona, he was back with Gilda, he was back with the bearded man in France, he was back at the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

universities, back at the theatre watching that preposterous cartoon, back here again on the mountain-top meeting the Black Skelm for the first time. No, he was further back than *that*, he was a little boy in Mama's arms, he was crawling, he couldn't even crawl, he was kicking inside a warm darkness, he was only a speck of liquified life, he was nothing, he was—

Everything.

Instantly he leaped forward and upward. The plain faded away beneath him, faded out of focus. He had no eyes to see it with, but he needed no eyes. He was one with immensity and perceived everything. He knew he was still standing—somewhere—and still grasping the black man's hand with his own. But the hand was huge enough to balance a sun on its palm, yet insubstantial enough to feel no pain from its molten mass.

Far below (*yes, it was below, there was still space and dimension, immeasurably transfigured as his body had been transfigured*) the wheeling planets moved in inexorable orbit.

A voice that was not a voice, a mere beat observed in soundlessness, impinged upon his expanded awareness.

"Behold the earth," it said. "A speck, a mite, an errant, inconsequential atom."

Harvey—or that part which remembered Harvey—had a momentary awareness of the old theory of the world as a single cell in the bloodstream of a cosmic monster. But it was not a cell, he perceived, any more than he was now a monster. It was just a speck, as the voice had said.

"Is this what God sees?" he asked.

"I do not know, for I am not yet God. To be God is to act. And I cannot decide. Shall I become God through action?"

"What action is possible?"

"Only one. To destroy this earth. To rearrange the cosmic pattern by removing the atom from being."

"Destroy? Why not save mankind?"

"God cannot save mankind. This I now know. God is great and Man is small. If left alone, Man will destroy himself. We alone can be saved—by becoming one with God."

"I dare not."

"Why? Do you so love the race of Man after what you've seen? Do you love the cesspool in which he wallows, the devices with which he brings about the destruction of others and of himself?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"But I am a man."

"No longer. You are in Limbo now. Not God, not human. There is no turning back. One must go forward."

"I cannot." Harvey—or the greater being that stood between the stars—turned and faced the black, brooding face—an image of immensity, intangible yet limned and luminous in space.

"Perhaps your life on earth was a sweeter one than mine. You did not see your people perish, and the old ways of nature vanish from the world. You did not skulk in a cave on a mountain-top for endless years, companioned by scavengers—nor feed, like them, on carrion corruption. Your skin was not black."

"You hate the world."

"I am above hate. And above love."

"Pity, then? Compassion?"

"For what? This insignificant speck, crawling with midges that will soon destroy it if left to their own devices?" The soundless voice thundered. "If there is pity, if there is compassion, let it be for one's self. I shall survive, in eternity. There will be other earths—"

"No!"

But the black, brooding face stared down and pursed its lips. Suddenly it blew, and spat. A cloud of ichor issued from the titanic, toothless maw. It spiralled, gathering speed and form as it fell, twisting into a tunneling black cloud.

The cloud encompassed the earth. The earth seemed to be sucked into the spiralling mass; its shell cracked and fire flared forth fitfully. But only for an instant. Then the spittle evaporated into nothingness and what it had encompassed was gone.

Gone? It had never existed.

Harvey—that which was Harvey now—turned and glanced into the great glowing face in the heavens beside him. But it too was gone. Not gone, but growing—growing to such size and at such a speed that it was impossible to perceive even a portion of its features. It was becoming space itself. The Black Skelm was God and had destroyed the earth—

Harvey's mouth opened, swallowing the universe in a soundless scream.

He could not follow the Black Skelm, grow into godhead. He could not go back to an earth which no longer existed, had never existed.

He could only scream, and merge into a swirling nothingness, a funnel that engulfed him without end . . . **THE END**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE PRICE OF EGGS

By
RANDALL
GARRETT

ILLUSTRATED by SUMMERS

Royal babies were pretty important on Dynak, even if they did hatch out of eggs. So when Boccaccio di Vino mated with the Shannil, everyone held their breath. Especially di Vino. He might not have much more of it.

YOU'LL find things a lot different out here, Lieutenant," said Colonel Hastings as he eyed the newly-arrived officer in a manner which was intended to be detached, and which failed by a narrow margin to do quite that. He levelled his gaze.

Lieutenant Donald John Newhouse nodded his head just the slightest and said, "Yes, sir."

"I appreciate the fact that you have been specially trained for this work," the colonel went on, "and I appreciate that Sector Headquarters must think very highly of you to send you out on something like this. But it is my own personal opinion that it takes more than theoretical work to understand the situation on an alien planet that one has never visited. You've got to live with it."

"Yes, sir," said Lieutenant Newhouse again. There was little else he could say; there was no point in arguing with the colonel. He was well aware that Colonel Hastings was angry because he had been unable to solve the problem that was facing him here on Dynak, and because Sector Headquarters had sent in a new man to do it—and a fresh-faced junior officer, at that. Logically, the colonel should have been angry with himself, not with Newhouse, but man does not function by logic alone.

Colonel Hastings toyed with a pink paperweight with one hand and scratched his button nose with the other, while his eyes remained steadily on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Newhouse. "I also appreciate the fact that you . . ."

Newhouse listened respectfully to what the colonel had to say, mentally making a note to the effect that Colonel Hastings, on his own word, was a very appreciative man. He seemed to appreciate everything.

". . . And I assure you that you will have every bit of data which we have so far obtained at your disposal."

He paused, and Newhouse, sensing that he should make some reply, said: "Thank you, sir; that will be very helpful."

The colonel sighed. "Very well. Don't hesitate to call on me for anything, Lieutenant. And—uh—" He paused suddenly looking wistful, like a kicked collie.

"Yes, sir?" said Newhouse respectfully.

"—uh—I trust you will keep me informed—ah—for my own information."

"As much as possible, sir," said Newhouse, trying hard not to feel sorry for the colonel.

"Very well," Colonel Hastings said morosely. "Unless there are any questions, you may go."

Newhouse detected the hopeful note in the other man's voice and responded. "I really don't think I can ask any intelligent questions until I've studied the problem thoroughly, sir."

The colonel looked gratified. "Very well. I appreciate your concern, Lieutenant. Thank you."

"Thank *you*, sir," Lieutenant Newhouse said saluting. Then he turned on his heel and left the office.

He moseyed over to the broad swath of green park that had been left as a relaxation spot when the base had been built. It wasn't crowded; there were only two or three men sitting on the benches, smoking and talking quietly. Newhouse found a bench to himself and sat down to mull things over.

There was nothing totally new in the situation here on Dynak. Newhouse, as a trouble-shooter knew that, even if Colonel Hastings didn't. Dynak was one of the many worlds which Man had decided not to colonize in spite of its inviting appearance. The biochemistry of the plants and animals was just a little too different to be compatible with Man, which meant that the planet would have to be wiped clean and started over in order to provide a suitable environment for human beings. And, aside

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from the fact that such a step would mean destroying millions of species that would better be preserved for study, it would mean the death of the several million humanoid natives of the planet—something that Man had no desire to be responsible for.

Dynak Base was not a military establishment; the Space Force as a whole used only a minor part of its energies for military purposes. Most of its activities were scientific in nature. Nonetheless, any base such as this had to be fortified to a certain extent. There were tribes of humanoids in the immediate vicinity which were, like all such cultural units at that stage of development, intensely hostile to anything strange. Right now, the majority of them were warily friendly with the Earthmen, but there was no way of knowing how long that uneasy peace might last. Meanwhile, they were doing useful work—bringing in samples of various types of fauna and flora for the labs to work on.

It all sounded fine so far, Newhouse thought grumpily. But the catch lay in the word "humanoid." Any reasonably intelligent race was classified as "humanoid" if they were erect, bifurcate animals—a definition which covered a mulitude of variations. Most of them you wouldn't want to meet alone in a dark alley, and if you did, it would be a toss-up as to which of you would be the most frightened. Oddly-colored skins, three-eyed faces, and other *outré* features were not at all uncommon among them.

Dynak was different. The humanoids were near human. The brown-yellow pigment in their skins wasn't melanin, and it was another pigment that gave them the intensely blue-violet eyes coloring; they had different kinds of glands inside, arranged differently; they were almost entirely hairless, except for soft patches of down on the top of the head; and they averaged about four feet seven in height. Not human, no. Definitely not *homo sapiens*.

But they certainly *looked* human. And, to top the whole thing off, the females were, to an Earthman's eyes, as pretty as little dolls. Except that dolls are normally not built so enticingly.

They weren't *all* beautiful, true, but there were enough beauties to tempt the weary Earthman. And those who weren't weary were even more tempted.

Their body chemistries were incompatible, of course; off-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

spring from such a union were impossible. But the union itself was certainly possible.

Even so, there hadn't been too much trouble. For one thing, there were plenty of human women on Dynak Base; for another, the semi-savage tribes which occupied the territory around Dynak Base had a rather *laissez faire* attitude, and a female's over-friendliness, even with alien giants from the sky, wasn't frowned upon. And, for a third, the savage women usually didn't come up to the standards of a fastidious Earthman, as far as general cleanliness was concerned.

But the women of the semi-barbaric city-state of Oassi, a hundred miles to the north, were a different matter entirely. Newhouse had never actually seen any of the native females, but the trimensional, full color, motion recordings had been graphic enough.

Newhouse could understand perfectly well why Boccaccio di Vino had managed to get himself into the jam he was in.

A man in civilian clothing had been approaching the bench Newhouse was seated on, but the lieutenant didn't pay much attention until the man stopped by the bench and said: "Lieutenant Newhouse?"

Newhouse started to rise. "Yes?"

"Sit down, Lieutenant," the other said, sitting down beside Newhouse. He was a lean, elderly man, with graying hair and a long-jawed, bony face that managed to show a strong sense of humor in spite of its saturnine construction. "I'm Bruce MacAuliffe; Colonel Hastings said you wanted to talk to me."

Newhouse swallowed. "Well, yes, sir; I did. But you didn't have to—"

MacAuliffe raised a hand. "That's all right. Hastings has his own way of doing things. There's no point in raising a fuss. And besides, I imagine you want to get things started. Something has to be done about di Vino."

MacAuliffe was the head of the Diplomatic Section on Dynak, and an outstanding expert on anthropology and xenology; Newhouse felt flattered that the man had taken the trouble to seek him out.

"Something has to be done, all right," Newhouse agreed, "but I'm not quite sure what at this point. In spite of the reports, I still don't have the whole picture."

MacAuliffe lifted a thin eye brow. "No? I thought my

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reports were comprehensive enough." But there was a definite twinkle in his eyes.

Newhouse grinned. "Hastings thinks the job can't be done till I've spent six months here because it's impossible to learn from reports; you think I can hop off immediately and get di Vino out of this jam, because everything can be learned from reports. It's a rough life we lead."

The diplomat grinned back. "Just what is it you want to know, Lieutenant?"

Newhouse then scratched thoughtfully at the area just behind his right ear. "Details, mostly, I guess. You and di Vino and the others went to Oassi to square away the details of this contract with the local government, and di Vino managed to get himself married. All as plain as my Aunt Millie's face. But I don't quite get a picture of Boccaccio di Vino the man nor of the personalities of the women involved."

MacAuliffe said: "I see. Well, di Vino himself is a very personable young man; good conversationalist and a fine diplomat—for a young man. He shows promise of getting somewhere in the field."

"Won't this caper sort of put a black mark on his record?"

MacAuliffe rubbed his long, thin nose sadly. "I'm afraid it will, yes. Shame, too. Mr. di Vino acted with the impetuosity of youth, and it'll probably follow him well into his old age."

"By then," said Newhouse, "he'll be bragging about it."

"Probably. He's just the type, though, who's a pushover for a set-up like that; pretty faces and figures go to his head. He and the Shannil, for instance, were ... ."

Newhouse listened while MacAuliffe talked.

The cultural level of the city-state of Oassi was similiar in many ways to that of Egypt in the fifteenth century B.C., or that of pre-classical Athens or Sparta. It differed strongly, however, in that it was essentially a matriarchy. Since the natives of Dynak were oviparous, the women were freed from the temporary disability that child-bearing brought to viviparous species. In the more savage tribes, the females suckled the young and cared for them from hatching until they were old enough to fend for themselves; in Oassi, however, most of the care of the young had been handed over to the males while the females ran the state. The fighters were of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

both sexes, carefully segregated into male and female battalions, but the top officers were all females.

Dynak Base had been built well away from Oassi; one of the strict rules of Earth was that no indigenous culture should be subjugated or influenced any more than necessary. Before any contact was made, a study of the more savage tribes had to be made.

Nonetheless, rumors had come out of the jungle that a strange group of aliens had built a fortress near the banks of the Ngong River, and the people of Oassi were aware of the presence of the Earthmen long before any contact had been made by the Earthmen themselves.

Eventually, diplomatic relations between the Earthmen and the Oassi people had been established simply because the Oassi army had sent an expeditionary force to find out the intentions of the strangers. There had been no actual fighting; the female general in charge of the troops had decided that it would be futile to attack Dynak Base and had asked, instead, for a parley.

The upshot of the whole incident was a decision to send a diplomatic party to Oassi itself. And Boccaccio di Vino had been a member of that party.

The trouble was that, at that time, di Vino and the others didn't know a great deal about the customs and mores of the Oassi. More exactly, di Vino didn't know that just holding hands with an Oassi girl was tantamount to a formal engagement. And di Vino hadn't just stopped with holding hands. After the party had been in the city sixty-three days, di Vino found himself legally married to Oanella, the daughter of the Shann and Shanni of Oassi, and heir to the throne. When the old Shanni died, Oanella would become Shanni, and di Vino, as her consort, would become Shann whether he liked it or not.

It might sound like a good position to be in, and, in a human society, it could have been just fine. But Oassi was not a human city, and di Vino wanted desperately to get out and go back to Dynak Base —even farther away, if possible.

Oassi had a pleasant little law regarding the crown princess and the Shanni. If no fertile eggs were laid within the first two hundred days of marriage, it was the duty of the royal personage to get herself another husband. But since

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

monogamy was strictly enforced, and since no one, not even the Shanni, could remarry while the spouse remained alive, the only way out for her highness was the obvious one. Consequently, Boccaccio di Vino had found himself facing death.

"The big trouble," said MacAuliffe, "is that the young Shannil seems to be actually proud of di Vino; her 'giant' is something for the lesser nobles to envy." His face darkened. "She'll probably miss him very much."

"We can't let them kill him," Newhouse said flatly.

"I hope not," MacAuliffe said, "but, outside of storming their city, I don't see how we can get him out of the citadel."

"I'll think of a way," Newhouse said grimly. "I'm going into the city with the next food convoy."

"Sometimes," said Master Sergeant Pemberton in a low voice, "I think this whole thing is a waste of time." He turned the wheel of the car a trifle to avoid a tree, then twisted it back to avoid another.

Newhouse stuck a cigarette in his mouth, fired it. "What? You mean, taking di Vino food? He might get pretty hungry."

"I didn't mean that, Lieutanant; I wouldn't want to let him starve. But driving in all this chow every so often, over a hundred miles of jungle, isn't my idea of an efficient way to run an outfit."

"What would you do, if it were your job to decide policy?" Newhouse asked, genuinely curious.

"Just what the colonel's doing now," Pemberton said. "I realize it's the only sensible way. But there are times when I wish we could just walk in there, pull out our guns, and tell them to hand him over or else."

"Sure," said Newhouse, "but who'd raise *gakgaks* for us then? You want to raise a whole herd and milk 'em yourself?"

"My mother didn't raise her little Willie to be a herdsman for alien critters," the sergeant said virtuously. "Besides, I wouldn't know how, and I'm not anxious to learn. Those things smell worse than a herd of sick hogs."

"Same thing I'd say," Newhouse agreed. "But Earth would scream so loud they could be heard in Messier 31 if their only supply of anti-cancer serum were to be cut off, or even reduced. And if you know of any way to get it except from *gakgak* milk,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a grateful galaxy will prostrate itself at your feet."

"I'd feel pretty silly if they did," said Pemberton, wrenching the wheel around to avoid another tree. "But it's a hell of a note that Dr. Chung had to find the stuff in *gakgak* milk at all. Why couldn't he have been sensible and found it in tree leaves or something? Then we wouldn't have to stay on good terms with a bunch of high-handed female dictators."

"No," said Newhouse, "probably not. But we'd probably have to stay on good terms with the savages around the base so they'd go out and gather leaves for us. What's the difference?"

"The difference," Pemberton said triumphantly, "is that we wouldn't have to worry about the care and feeding of our boy, di Vino."

"Um," said Newhouse, realizing when he'd been beaten.

Pemberton glanced in his rear view mirror. "They having trouble back there? No, I guess not; they just slowed down a little."

Newhouse swiveled his head around and peered at the second car, which was following them. Like their own, it floated a foot off the ground on its antigravs as it moved through the jungle. It didn't seem to be having any trouble.

"There's another thing, Lieutenant," Pemberton said. "I don't like the idea of carrying a dame along. Not that she's any trouble, but she might get hurt. This isn't exactly the cornfields of Iowa, you know."

"I think Captain Smith can take care of herself," Newhouse said. "She's a pretty tough gal."

"I'd rather have her on my side than against me, that's for sure," the sergeant admitted, "but my protective instincts always rise when I see a woman out in the wilds like this. Even if she is an officer."

Newhouse started to answer, but there was a pounding on the roof of the car. Pemberton slowed, rolled down the window, stuck out his head, and said something in a language Newhouse didn't understand.

Ksitka, a hunter from one of the tribes near Dynak Base, jabbered something back in the same tongue. Pemberton pulled his head back in.

"He says he smells trouble. There's a group of those lizard-like carnivores up ahead —two or three, he says. We'll have to go around 'em; I don't want to get tangled up with those babies." He turned the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wheel, and the car angled to the right. "Can't go to the left," he explained. "There's a cliff there that we couldn't make."

For a long minute, he was silent. Then: "And that's another thing, Lieutenant; we have to keep these cars close to the ground. If we could fly 'em, we'd have been to Oassi hours ago. But no, just because we're not to reveal our strength to the natives, we have to go creeping along like snails. Why, when I . . ."

Newhouse folded his arms across his chest and closed his eyes. Sergeant Pemberton was a compulsive griper, but his droning voice made a nice lullaby.

When they hove into sight of the city gates of Oassi, Pemberton shook the lieutenant. "We're here, sir. Their scouts spotted us twenty miles back, and the guard of honor is lined up, waiting for us."

Newhouse shoved himself into a more upright position and looked out at the pygmy-sized natives lined up in gorgeous array, in brightly-colored kilts and feathers. They looked, Newhouse opined, like a cross between a regiment of Scottish Highlanders and a group of Zulu warriors in full battle array. Each man had a longbow and a quiver of arrows slung across the back of his shoulders, and each was carrying a seven-foot, metal-tipped spear in his right hand.

"Very impressive," said Newhouse. "Okay, Sergeant; let's get our own show on the road."

Both men got out of the car and marched solemnly back to the second car. Ksitka slid off the top of the car and marched back with them, looking very proud and haughty in his resplendent Earth-designed uniform, which was even gaudier than those of the Oassi forces.

At the door of the rear car, they paused. Newhouse opened it, and all three bowed low as Captain Virginia Smith emerged.

She was not in uniform, as the other spacemen were; she wore an array of robes and jewels that would have looked pretentious at a British Coronation. She was a tall woman; a full six feet in height; broad in proportion, she was a thirty-six year old career officer who could look both commanding and matronly.

Ksitka, who had been carefully coached in his role, ran around behind her and lifted the train of her robes

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

so that they would not drag the ground. Then the four of them marched solemnly up to the honor guard, Newhouse and Pemberton in the lead, with Captain Smith and Ksitka trailing behind, leaving the cars in charge of the driver of the second vehicle.

The Oassi guard, trying very hard not to look impressed, closed ranks and marched to the city gates with them. Newhouse had already noticed the effect that had been produced, however. The Oassi could see that Virginia Smith was obviously a woman, and a very powerful one at that. Thus, she commanded a respect that mere males could not have hoped for.

At the gate, the procession was met by a trio of Oassi females whose dress, impressive though it was, couldn't even compare with that of Captain Smith. Even little Ksitka's uniform was flashier.

Ksitka himself was in absolute ecstasy, in spite of the fact that his face was as stony and expressionless as an Easter Island idol's. His tribe had been looked down on and sneered at by the city-dwellers since time immemorial. And now, he, Ksitka the Hunter, was superior to the Oassi. It was a good feeling, and Ksitka was revelling in it.

The three Oassi bowed low as the Earthmen approached, and one of them said: "Her Splendor, the Shanni, awaits you at the citadel. May I inquire as to the rank of our honored guest?"

Newhouse had studied the Oassi language, and, although his accent was a bit heavy, he was perfectly lucid. "This is Her Supremacy, the Captain," he said with dignity.

"*Kepteen?*" the Oassi woman repeated. "An exalted rank, no doubt."

"No doubt at all," Newhouse agreed rather ambiguously. "She has come to pay her respects to her sister, the Shanni."

That made Captain Smith's rank perfectly clear; as a "sister", she was obviously the equal of the Shanni.

"Come this way," the officer said. "Transportation has been provided. I am afraid, however, that we must apologize to Her Supremacy for the inadequacy of the sedan chair we provided; we were not prepared for the visit of so exalted a personage."

"I will speak to Her Supremacy," Newhouse said. He turned to Captain Smith. "They want to apologize because they haven't got a sedan chair fancy enough for you,"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he said in English. "They're really impressed."

"I thought that's what the gal said," replied the captain, keeping her face haughty. "I can understand the language better than I can speak it. What should I say?"

"Anything you like; you're doing fine. Say something to me, and look as condescending as possible."

"Very well," she said, complying, "convey my compliments and tell them they can all go stick their noses in their ears and blow their brains out."

"Thank you," said Newhouse, bowing low. "I'll tell them, but it may lose something in translation."

He turned to the officer and reverted to Oassi. "Her Supremacy understands your lack of proper transportation perfectly, and she will convey her apologies to the Shanni for this unexpected visit. Her Supremacy realizes that you are not at all to blame for not providing a sedan chair suitable for her rank, and she has therefore graciously condescended to wait until a chair of suitable dignity is provided for the remainder of the way."

"Her Supremacy is most gracious," said the diminutive officer, gazing up at the towering captain in awe. "There will be as little delay as possible."

She turned and barked orders at a squad of husky males standing nearby, and they turned and trotted off at high speed. It was nearly fifteen minutes before they returned, during which time the Earthmen and the Oassi tried to outdo each other in displaying nothing but stolid patience.

The "chair of suitable dignity" was quite something. It was painted a rust red and decorated with gold leaf and polished but unfaceted gems. It took a dozen of the little aliens, six on either side, to hoist the thing off the ground and carry it after Captain Smith had climbed in. She was obviously a little cramped in a conveyance built for someone two-thirds her size, but she bore it with dignified hauteur. Ksitka, looking very superior, trotted along beside the sedan chair; he was big for a Dynakian, standing a good three inches taller than the city-dwellers.

Newhouse and Pemberton had climbed into the less brightly decorated chairs that they'd provided, and were carried along behind the captain as the procession wound its

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

way through the streets of the city toward the citadel.

A runner had been sent on ahead to warn the Shanni that an unexpected guest was coming, and she and her rather diminutive consort were on the top step of the citadel, flanked by another batch of guardsmen when the guests arived. Her daughter, the Shannil, and her consort, Boccaccio di Vino, were nowhere to be seen.

That's partial confirmation, at least, Newhouse thought wryly. The jungle tribesmen who had occasion to trade in the city had brought word back that the Shannil feared that her new husband might take it in his head to return to his own people—a crime which, like suicide, might not be punishable when successful, but to try and fail was a criminal offense in Oassi. Evidently the citadel guards were making sure that loverboy didn't go over the hill.

Not that he'd ever been allowed much freedom. The royal family had kept a wary eye on him ever since the wedding; the old Shanni seemed to have a hunch that di Vino hadn't realized he was a bridegroom until it was too late, and she had seemed to sense right away that he was not too keen on the idea of staying.

As arranged, it was Sergeant Pemberton who performed all the amenities and introductions between Her Supremacy, the Captain, and Her Splendor, the Shanni. In the first place, his Oassish was better, and, in the second, Newhouse wanted to observe the expressions on the faces of the Shanni and the Shann.

The Shann was an elderly male who looked—naturally—rather henpecked. He didn't say much; he just stood there and smiled half-heartedly as the Shanni chatted in friendly fashion with her "sister," Captain Virginia Smith, through the fluent interpretation of Pemberton. They might have been any ruling family of Earth welcoming another chief executive.

Pemberton, of course, was giving the impression that Captain Smith was the ruler of the alien fortress that was situated a hundred miles away, on the banks of the Ngang River. The people of Oassi hadn't been informed of the true origin of the Earthmen, nor would they be; as far as Oassi was concerned, they came from a "far land," and knew a little something about magic, but they weren't dangerous, they just had to be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

watched, like any other non-Oassi group. And, after all, Oassi had a much larger army and the magicians and priests of Oassi had magic, too, didn't they? *Sure* they did.

And Earth, the capital of the United Commonwealth of Planets, not only liked the way things stood, but demanded that they be kept that way. Any civilization which appeared to be capable of lifting itself by its own bootstraps should do so; at this stage of the game, Man should not interfere. Of course, their very presence on the planet had already, changed, somewhat, the course of Oassi's history, but that couldn't be helped; nothing can be observed without affecting it.

The Shanni of Oassi appeared to be pleasantly impressed with Captain Smith, just as Newhouse had figured. She had certainly not been impressed by human males, which was perfectly understandable. What would Haroun al Rashid have said if some other country had sent a delegation of women to Baghdad?

Oh, the Shanni had been perfectly happy to agree to a treaty to furnish *gakgak* milk for good, honest gold (well, maybe not *too* honest; it was the product of an atomic converter), but that was just business. Gold is fine stuff, even if a lowly male brings it.

But when it came to statesmanship, that was a different matter. The Shanni seemed obviously more at home with Captain Smith, even if the conversation did have to be filtered through Sergeant Pemberton.

After a minute or two, the Shanni turned to a nearby officer and gave her a slight nod. The whole guard unit wheeled about in precision array and everyone marched into the citadel: a half dozen guards in the lead, followed by the Shanni and Shann, and Captain Smith; Pemberton and Newhouse followed them, and behind the two officers came the rest of the guardsmen. And last, but foremost, came the carriers bearing the precious bundles of Earth-type food.

The banquet that night was a sumptuous, but somewhat lopsided affair, Newhouse thought. The Oassi stuffed themselves like pigs, and the four Earth people ate nothing. The Shanni already understood that her guests, for some mysterious reason, could not partake of Oassi food.

Boccaccio di Vino and his wife, the Shannil, had made

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

their appearance, and di Vino, still a diplomat, put on an excellent face, but there was worry in his eyes.

Newhouse wanted to pump some information out of him, but he didn't dare address him in English, for fear that the Shanni might suspect a plot was being fomented at her banquet table, right under her nose. But that was just the reason why he had told Captain Smith not even to speak the few words of Oassish that she did know.

He smiled at her and said: "Captain, I'm going to be talking to our friend, the bridegroom, but pretend I'm addressing you. I'm not going to mention your name," he went on, knowing that di Vino was listening, "because they'd recognize the words. Captain, say something in a questioning tone. Something fairly long."

"Fine," she said, "because I do have a question to ask. How long do you think we'll have to be here before we can get our diplomat out?"

"I don't know. That's why I want to ask some questions." Then he turned to the Shanni and smiled. "Her Superemacy wishes to inquire as to the health of the royal family, if that is not forbidden by rules of etiquette." He knew perfectly well that it wasn't.

"Not at all," said the Shanni, in her rather high, brittle voice. "Our family is quite well. All sound in body and mind. Although—" A small smile came to her face, and something shone in her eyes. "—we await fertile eggs."

"I see." He turned to Captain Smith, but his words were obviously meant for di Vino. "Don't speak to Smith until I've spoken to you in Oassish. What I want to know is, how many unfertile clutches of eggs has your wife produced so far, and how long is the production cycle?"

Captain Smith nodded. "Tell me, what am I supposed to do?"

"Just look at the Shanni and smile, then smile *very* benignly on the Shanni."

While that was going on, Newhouse turned pleasantly to di Vino. "And how are you and your wife, Your Eminence?"

"Quite well, thank you," said di Vino suavely. "We expect to have a family before long, you know."

"Indeed? I hope your attempts will be successful."

"We all do," said the Shanni in a smooth voice. Looking at her, Newhouse could see why, in spite of her alienness,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

she had been the cause of di Vino's troubles.

There was a momentary silence around the room.

Then di Vino looked at Smith and said casually: "I don't know who you are, Lieutenant, but if you can get me out of this mess, you can have my right arm. To answer your question, my—uh—wife produces an egg every sixty-five days or thereabouts. The fertilization has to take place about twenty days before the cycle is completed. Since I've been here, she's produced two. If the next one isn't fertile, I'll end up in the family mausoleum, accompanied by much lamentation." He paused and smiled at Captain Smith expectantly.

Smith smiled back. "I have a question, if you two don't mind. If that's the case, it seems to me that these people could have a child every sixty-five days. They'd have overrun the planet centuries ago."

"No," di Vino said. "Even the cycles have cycles—or epicycles, maybe. The females produce three or four, stop for about four years before another cycle comes on. I just happened to catch this girl at the wrong time; otherwise, I wouldn't be married now."

"I see," said the captain. She smiled pleasantly.

Before di Vino could say anything in answer, the Shanni's voice cut in — rather sharply, Newhouse thought. "Are you a relative of the Kapteen, my dear?" she asked di Vino.

"No, Your Splendor," said di Vino.

"Well, in Oassi, well-bred princes don't speak to visiting ladies to whom they are not related. And remember, my dear, you're an Oassi now."

"I beg forgiveness, your Splendor," di Vino said humbly.

That put somewhat of a chill on the whole dinner party. Conversation from that point on was utterly innocuous and utterly boring.

Newhouse only got one more small piece of information. The Shanni's consort, the Shann, had made a remark about having "produced his three eggs," and further conversation elicited the information that each Shanni or Shannil was supposed to have three children by her consort. Newhouse marked it down in his mental files for later use when he formed a plan.

When the meal was finally finished, the visitors were taken to their quarters in a wing of the citadel reserved for visitors, well away from

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the wing reserved for the Shanni and Shann.

The citadel itself was built strongly, with the thick walls of a fortress, and the heavy silverwood doors—white as limed oak and hard as teak—were capable of being barred from either side. Although the Earthmen were not locked in, there was an "honor" guard in the hall outside, and Newhouse had no doubt that any idea he might have of roaming about the citadel would be politely but firmly vetoed.

The apartment that had been assigned to them was hardly comfortable by modern Terrestrial standards, though a medieval English baron would probably have been cozy enough.

"Looks like a jail, sir," said Sergeant Pemberton as he surveyed the room.

"It is," said Newhouse. "I'm afraid that freedom of the grounds isn't on our agenda." He walked over to the door that connected his and the sergeant's room with the one next to it.

"Come in, Lieutenant," said Virginia Smith.

Newhouse pushed open the heavy door. "I'm going to take a flit about the citadel, Captain," he said. "Would you and the sergeant whip up something to eat? I shouldn't be gone long."

"All right. But watch yourself. My Supremacy might be a little hard put to explain what you were doing if you got caught."

"Don't worry; I'm supposed to get an Earthman out of a jam, not get another one in. You want to give me that harness?"

"Sure. Close the door and give me two minutes."

Newhouse did as he'd been asked. Captain Smith had been wearing an antigrav harness under her robes. Since none of the three was obviously carrying a sword, axe, or spear, it had been assumed that they were unarmed, except, perhaps for a small dagger or the like, which was perfectly permissable. But the Oassi had no idea what the term "minaturization" meant. Newhouse, Pemberton, and Smith were all armed to the teeth.

Even so, an antigravity unit required extra clothing to cover it; the uniforms of Pemberton—and—Newhouse were a little too close-fitting to hide it completely.

Captain Smith was better than her word. Less than two minutes later, she opened the door and handed Newhouse the harness. The lieutanant

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

put it on and walked over to the narrow, slitlike window that looked out on the courtyard.

Dynak was a moonless planet, and, at this time of year, the stars that might have shone in the night sky were obscured by the black blanket of a nearby dark nebula, a great dustcloud that shrouded most of the sky.

Except for the flickering torches in the courtyard below and the glow of candlelight from the windows of the citadel, the walls of the citadel were in utter darkness. Certainly the guards forty feet below couldn't see a man crawling along the walls, and they probably wouldn't believe their eyes if they did.

Newhouse then adjusted the power unit to a point where he only weighed a few ounces and lifted his feet off the floor, doubling his knees up against his abodomen. Since his mass remained the same, he drifted downwards very slowly under the slight pull of attenuated gravity.

"You're not completely neutralized," Captain Smith then pointed out.

"I don't want to be," Newhouse said. "I've got to have a little weight so that I can get a fingertip purchase on that rough wall. Otherwise, I'm likely to push myself away from it, and I don't want to use the air jet unless I have to." He landed lightly on his heels and then stood up slowly, so as not to push himself off the floor again. He slid, rather than walked, back to the window. "Bye, kiddies," he said. "Save me a sandwich." And he eased himself out the window.

He was gone longer than he had thought he would be. It took him nearly an hour to find which of the windows in the royal wing opened into Boccacio di Vino's bedroom, moving himself carefully across the stone wall of the citadel, avoiding windows, staying out of sight of the patrols that walked the upper parapets, and keeping his ears open for the distinctive sound of the Earthman's voice. He even found time to curse the nomadic tribes that roamed the grass plains to the south because their very existence kept the city of Oassi in a perpetual state of preparedness against raids, which meant that there were lookouts and guards all over the place and he had to be extra cautious.

At each window, he had to skirt around it, pause and listen, then carefully ease a tiny spy-eye out to take a look

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

inside, until he found di Vino's quarters.

When he finally found them, he had to wait another ten minutes while di Vino and the young Shannil concluded a rather strained conversation. When the Shannil walked off toward her own room, Newhouse peeked his head around the edge of the window and said: "Hssst! Di Vino!"

The young diplomat jerked his head around quickly. When he saw who it was, he ran quickly to the window. "What is it?" he asked. "Are we getting out of here?"

"Not just yet. I'm getting you out of here all nice and legal-like, if I can. We won't use force except as the last resort." He didn't add that such a "very last resort" might be too late for di Vino.

"But—how?"

"Never mind that now; I've got to get some information. It's vitally necessary. I tried to get it at the banquet, but the Shanni shut you up."

"Sure. Anything you want."

"Well, I know all about the cyclic pattern of Dynakian reproduction, but I need *specific* information. Times and dates, right down to the minute, if possible."

"That's easy," di Vino said wryly. "The Shanni is keeping pretty accurate records, and so is Oanella. She knows by now that I don't love her, and she's going to be perfectly happy to get rid of me. She—"

"Never mind that now!" Newhouse snapped in irritation. "The *dates* man! The *dates!*"

Hurriedly, di Vino told him. When he did, Newhouse breathed a sigh of relief. "Good! We've got three days yet!" He fished into his jacket and came out with a small, black cylinder a little larger than a cigarette, with a small stud at one end. "You know how to use a sleep gun?"

Di Vino nodded.

"Good. Take it. Keep it on you at all times. Day after tomorrow when Oanella goes to sleep for the night, use it on her. But, for heavens sake, *wait till she gets to sleep.* Got that?"

"Right. Then what?"

"Then wait for me to show up. That sleep gun's got a signal built into it. As soon as you shoot her, I'll know about it. All you'll have to do is blow out your candles, so that there's no light coming from your room. Got that?"

"I've got it. But—"

There were footsteps outside the door. "So long," Newhouse whispered. "Don't slip up. He moved away from the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

window just as the door opened, and he heard the Shannil say: "What's so interesting at the window, dear? Getting homesick?" There was more than a trace of scarcasm in her voice.

Newhouse made his way back to his own quarters as fast as he could.

"Hope I didn't worry anyone," he said as he popped into the window.

"Nope," said Pemberton. "We figured if you'd been caught there would have been an uproar and we'd have heard about it. Come in and have a sandwich. And some coffee."

"In a minute," said Newhouse. I've got some radioing to do."

"The call box is on the table," said Captain Virginia Smith.

The next day was largely devoted to discussion between Her Supremacy, the Captain, and Her Splendor, the Shanni, on the increased production of *gakgak* milk. The Shanni, after much careful negotiation, promised that more would be forthcoming.

Newhouse, personally, had a hunch that the Shanni was trying to negotiate a treaty with the southern nomads for *gakgak* milk, with the intent of selling it to the Earthmen at a profit—which was all right with everyone, if she could swing it.

The third day was much like the second, but this time, Newhouse began to inject something new into the discussions — presumably suggestions from Captain Smith.

"Would it be possible, Your Splendor, to have the young Shannil's consort return home for a space of — say, ten days?"

A wary look came into the old woman's eyes, but the smile never left her face. "The Shannexa's home is Oassi," she said smoothly.

"True, true. We apologize for the error in terminology. Let us say, rather, that we would like to have him visit his previous home."

The Shanni looked almost apologetic. "It would be my pleasure to allow the dear child to revisit his old home," she said, "but, alas, it cannot be."

"Indeed?"

"I fear not. The ancient laws of Oassi are very strict on that point, and I would not dare to violate them. Even the Shanni is not all-powerful. My people would disown me if I violated so powerful a taboo."

"Just what is this — ah — law, Your Splendor?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"A very ancient one, Your Supremacy. No royal consort may leave his wife until he produces his three eggs. Three offspring, in other words, of which at least one must be a girl."

"Ah, well, of course, we would hesitate to ask you to violate so powerful a law. We will be content to wait. But you will permit the visit at that time?"

The Shanni smiled thinly. "I give you my solemn vow that he will be permitted to leave when — and *if* — that time arrives."

Well, well, well, Newhouse thought to himself, *the old dame suspects already that her daughter can never have children by di Vino. She's out after his hide. And it's getting more obvious by the minute.*

"And how long do you estimate that to be, Your Splendor?"

The Shanni's eyes became veiled. "You know our law. But, even if the first egg is produced within the period, I'm afraid it would be another four years before the next is produced. It would be four years at the minium before he could leave."

"Very well. So be it." The subject was dismissed as though it were a light thing, but Newhouse already had what he wanted. Every Oassi noble in the room had heard the Shanni make a solemn vow.

That night, Newhouse sat by his detector, waiting for it to give the telltale blink that would come when di Vino fired the sleep gun. When it did come, Newhouse already had his harness on, and he was out the window before the glow had died in the telltale. He scuttled crabwise across the great stone wall of the citadel, but this time he knew exactly where he was going, and he made it in less than ten minutes.

Di Vino was waiting in the darkened window. "Thank heaven!" he whispered. I thought you'd never get here. Now what."

"Where is she?" Newhouse asked.

"Over on the bed."

"Good. Now put a blanket or something over that window so that the guard can't see a light."

When the window was blacked out and a candle had been lit, Newhouse bent over the unconscious female. The sleep gun had done its work well.

"All right, di Vino, help me get this harness on her. We're kidnapping the Shannil."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Kidnap the—" Di Vino choked and blinked. "But *I'm* the one who's supposed to get out of here."

"I'll explain the whole thing when she's gone. Come on! We haven't much time!"

When the Shannil was securely fixed in the harness, Newhouse turned up the power until her weight was a minus twenty pounds. Then he fastened a length of strong plaston cording to the harness. Then he clamly tossed her out the window. She fell upwards fairly rapidly.

When the cord was taut, Newhouse tied the end of it around the arm of a heavy silverwood chair. "That's that," he said. "Now all we have to do is wait."

Boccaccio di Vino said: "Wait? For *what?* What's going on?"

"Your lady-love is about two hundred feet over the citadel, with a signalling gadget on her. There's been an aircar hovering on its antigravs up there for the last two hours. When they pick up the signal, they'll pick up the girl. Simple, isn't it?"

"But what are they going to do?"

Newhouse grinned. "I think I'll let you suffer a while longer. Teach you to keep away from strange females."

"I've already learned that," di Vino said morosely.

"Then this ought to drive it home, pal. Just sit down and relax; we've got several hours to kill. Got a drink?"

"Some Scotch," said di Vino in a glum tone. "And a deck of cards, if we have to kill time. Play cribbage?"

"Yup. Drag 'em out."

The cord moved a little, and Newhouse knew they were taking the Shannil out of the harness, which would be left there until they came back.

"That's that for a while," he said. "Get the bottle out."

By the time the rope was jiggled once more, Lieutenant Newhouse had taken a week's wages from di Vino at cribbage, to be payable when the diplomat returned to Dynak Base. Newhouse blew out the candle, went over and pushed the blanket aside, and took a cautious look up. He couldn't see a thing, but a second tug on the rope told him that all was well. He began hauling down on the line. The girl came easily, since the men in the aircar had reduced her negative weight to zero, and then added a couple of ounces of positive weight.

When she appeared at the window, the two men pulled her in, and Newhouse took off

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the antigravity harness and began putting it on himself. "Just let her sleep," he told di Vino. "She won't know a thing in the morning."

Di Vino narrowed his eyes. "What did they do to her? If—"

"*If,* nothing," Newhouse snapped. "We got you out of a jam. We hope. Now just relax and take it easy. See you in a while." He climbed out the window again. He grinned to himself as he went crabwise across the face of the wall. Di Vino thought he knew what had happened, and di Vino was dead wrong. He couldn't have been further off base.

The Captain and her entourage departed the next morning amid a gush of good wishes and a show of pageantry, with an invitation to return at a later date. They got into the cars and went back into the jungle, headed for Dynak Base. Newhouse reported to Colonel Hastings and told him nothing except that he had made a "preliminary survey" of the situation at Oassi. If his plan didn't work, Newhouse didn't want Hastings looking smug.

Then Lieutenant Newhouse just sat around, looking as though he were thinking hard, while one day after another trudged its weary way into eternity.

One fine day, he went with the food car again, and when he returned, he had Boccaccio di Vino with him.

"I still don't see what made them let you go, di Vino," the colonel said with puzzled anger.

"Frankly, I'm not sure what happened, myself," Boccaccio admitted. He turned toward Newhouse, and there was anger in his eyes. "But I think Lieutenant Newhouse can explain."

Newhouse said: "What's the matter, di Vino? You still in love with that girl?"

"Well—" Di Vino paused, and an odd look came into his eyes. "Well I guess I am—in a way. Not that I'd go back; I'm not the right man for her at all. But—well—she was a good kid. And—" The anger came back. "—and what you had done to her would have gotten you hanged if you'd done it back on Earth."

Bruce MacAuliffe, di Vino's immediate superior, was also standing beside Colonel Hastings' desk. "What did he do di Vino?"

"He got Oanella pregnant!" di Vino said. "Or, well, ***he*** didn't. But he had someone else do it. And while she was un-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

conscious, too! Probably got one of the local savages to—"

"I did no such thing," Newhouse interrupted mildly. "I—"

"Now, just a minute," Colonel Hastings interrupted. "You said that she got pregnant, di Vino. You mean that she laid a fertile egg?"

"Yes. I mean, well, no, not exactly. She produced *four* fertile eggs. Which is pretty darned unusual. Her mother and father got all excited. The Shanni was all a dither, and her consort was getting so nervous he went into a fit of the shakes. You should have seen that old gal running around like a scalded cat. And you should have been there when the fit hit the Shann. It's the first time any Oassi female has ever produced four fertile eggs at once." He looked at Newhouse again. "Just what did you do?"

"Yes," said Colonel Hastings heavily. "I think we all deserve an explanation."

"The biotechnicians would be able to tell you better than I, sir," Newhouse said. "They're writing up a report on it. It's a simple process, in effect, but a very delicate one.

"We simply had to wait until the single ovum the Shannil was carrying had arrived at the proper stage of development—something the biotechs had found out in checking on the local savages. They removed the unfertilized ovum and put it through two different processes. First, they self-fertililized it. When an ovum is formed by splitting of the parent cell, the egg itself retains half the chromosomes, while the other half are thrown off in what is called a polar body. The boys simply used the polar body to fertilize the egg. Then they waited until the fertile ovum divided the first time and separated the cells; when the second division occurred, the cells were separated again, giving them four. These were replaced, and in due time, the Shannil produced four fully developed eggs. And they'll all hatch females; it's possible to tell by the shape of the rubbery shell whether an egg will be a male or female, so the Shanni was happy as a lark. The girls, of course, will be exact genetic duplicates of their mother—who is also their father, although she doesn't know it. Still—" He grinned. "—there's an old saying: 'If you want a job done right, do it yourself.'"

THE END

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GREAT SCIENCE FICTION FROM FANTASTIC

LLOYD BIGGLE, JR.	THE MADDER THEY COME
BRYCE WALTON	THE MAN ON THE ISLAND
ROG PHILIPS	WORLD OF TRAITORS
FRITZ LEIBER	DAMNATION MORNING
JACK SHARKEY	THE KINK-REMOVER
MACK REYNOLDS	TORO!
ROBERT F. YOUNG	MR. AND MRS. SATURDAY NIG
ROBERT BLOCH	THE FUNNEL OF GOD
RANDALL GARRETT	THE PRICE OF EGGS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED